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CULTIVATING COFFEE IN THE HIGHLANDS OF CHIAPAS: THE AESTHETICS OF HEALTH IN THE MEXICAN CAMPESINATO

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Abstract

Attending to the felt quality of experience, this work looks at how a community of Mexican *campesinos* go about their life while cultivating coffee, trying to make sense of how villagers feel, know, and understand the world "on their own terms". The aim is to work through (and from) the plane of the body, a narrative strategy that seeks to convey some of the give an take of everyday life; the joy and salubrity that are often bounded in moments of good health, the sorrow and pain that poverty entails. But since "well being" is not "culture free" but guided by moral and aesthetic constraints, I map out the cultural "building blocks" to see how local notions of health and illness tie into feelings of integrity or fragmentation. Last, we look at what social ideals underscore notions of personhood and how these shape local experiences of land.

Pour répondre à la qualité sentie de l'expérience, cet ouvrage montre comment une communité de *campesinos* Mexicains qui concentrent leurs vies à cultiver le café, essaye de donner sens à la manière dont les paysans sentent, connaissent, et comprennent le monde dans "leur propres termes". Le but est de travailler à travers (et à partir) du plan du corps; une stratégie narrative en guise de transmettre les douleurs et la salubrité qui sont souvent determinées par des moments de pauvreté et de bonne santé. Spécifiquement, mon interêt est d'explorer la façon dont les notions locales de santé et de maladie se lient aux sentiments d'integrité et de fragmentation. Pourtant, puisque le bienêtre et la maladie ne sont pas "exempts de culture" mais guidés par des contraintes, il s'agit d'examiner les sensibilités culturelles et les valeurs esthétiques qui animent les expériences locales.

..."for me all nature is silenced with the ticking of the law and its meassure."

Nietzche; from his poem *Against the Laws*

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Preface

As a child and young boy, I grew-up in two towns in rural Mexico. Since birth, I lived in Tepoztlán, a small town of Aztec heritage in the state of Morelos that is now a popular site not far from Mexico City. Then, at the age of four, our family changed states and travelled south to Michuacán, to an agrarian *pueblo* called Tacámbaro. At the time (and even much later), I did not realise the poignancy of these experiences, and how present they would be in the rest of my adult life. I had little idea that, twenty-seven years ahead, I would be using them as a platform to write about the Mexican *campesinato*, as I have come to know it over the years.

I have been living in Canada for almost eleven years, going back to Mexico every so often for a visit. As a bachelor I studied in the departments of Latin American Studies and Trans-cultural Communications, in Simon Fraser University. For the most part, I learned about the field of 'development', particularly in relation to Mexican peasants. Like most students, I found more information than I could learn and a series of new perspectives which gave me new handles on the world. But one of the most valuable things I learned during my years of study, was to see Mexico from the outside, through eyes of Canadians and other foreign cultures. The issues that were talked about the most during classes related to class inequality, abuse of human rights, and the environmental negligence that deteriorated the quality of life in Latin America. The strategies we studied followed the general guidelines of sustainable development, a view that, in general, seeks to balance the asymmetric power relations by "empowering" people. In theory, the belief is that putting power back in the hands of peasants helps address the skewing of income distribution, ecological destruction, and gender inequality.

The material was valuable. Yet, I felt that the way in which we were choosing to talk about Mexico was limited to a perspective that, due to the analytical tendency of academic life, did not convey a *campesino*'s life the way he or she experiences it. To me, a great deal was being left out, although at the time I could not articulate well what exactly it was that we were omitting from our

accounts. All I knew, like many other students pointed out themselves, was that the accounts we were reading did not report on the vital dimension of people's experiences, resulting in interpretations that were either "too cold" or "too dry". What we were after, as I now see the problem, was to understand development as an activity occurring in a vital context; of the "felt quality" intrinsic to moments of health and illness, of joy and shame. This became especially important because we, after all, were trying to make sense of economic and political activity as it contributed to people's "well being" and "levels of satisfaction". The buzzword was to "qualify development". We learned about "social relations", "alternative economic systems", "political structures", and "sustainable forms of irrigation", but we never really got a feel for how these events contributed to the sensory grounds of people's sense of joy, health, or sorrow. The vitality of people's experiences simply slipped between the cracks of our methodology; meanwhile, we continued to talk about "well being" by using quantitative variables such as "life expectancy", "levels of satisfaction", and "per capita income".

Since then, I've been pursuing this query. The issue became particularly pressing to me because I have seen how Mexican *campesinos*, despite their financial difficulty and the hardships that their life entails, have always valued and maintained a great sense of vital disposition towards life. Unfortunately, this animic richness, this vital salubrity, did not come through in our classes, and neither were they considered in the methods and goals of development projects. In my estimation, aspiring to people's "well being" does not make any sense unless we talk about it in terms of a sentient condition, attending to development activity as it hinders or facilitates local senses of pain, joy, or comfort.

This is the context that animates this work, a continuation to a query that, unknowingly, began to take form in Tepoztlán and Tacámbaro and which, today, continues to grow as I write this. This work, then, is about "making sense" of the Mexican *campesinato* as a sensory experience that is vital, considering how people feel, know, and understand the everyday life "in their own terms".

Chapter One

Introduction

Since the late seventies and early eighties, people in the field of development have been eagerly working on "qualifying" development activity, trying to make our models more sensitive towards the degradation of the environment, the skewing of income distribution, and to gender inequalities. It seems to me that this general trend to qualify economic and political activity is a vital "turning point"[1] for the way we see, feel, and understand development work; mainly, because we are now trying to "make sense" of development by attending to socio-political changes *as they are felt* by people, as opposed to understanding these changes in mere quantitative, functional, and structural terms. For instance, we no longer interpret development activity in terms of 'economic systems' and 'political structures' only, but we understand it as an activity that impacts how people feel, make sense of, and understand these changes. I suspect that this is what we are trying to get at with our categories "well being", "levels of satisfaction", "quality of life", and "standards of living" --to learn about the "felt-quality" of people's experience and report on how feelings of salubrity, sorrow, and comfort, tie into moments of poverty or good health.

At the risk of simplifying a spectrum of views and glossing over what will be explored below, I believe that the general trend of development circles is to place "sustainable development" within a field of life that is sentient, trying to understand socio-political activity as poignant experiences that impact the "sensory grounds" of people. But although we are striving to direct our efforts towards this goal and continuously allude to human sentience in our reports and government meetings --to how people feel and experience development change-- we seem short from achieving it. The failure seems partly due to our commitment to objectivist methodologies and ethnographic realism which, for their mere analytical nature, treat experience from a more cognate, less sensate, point of view.

So far, people in development have been qualifying development activity by committing themselves to a semiotic view of culture, privileging interpretations that ground their understanding in symbolic actions, structural relations, or deep psychic processes[2]. In general, these type of approaches see culture as a rich "forest of symbols" where the significance of a myth or a funeral can be discovered by slowly peeling off semantic layers of meaning, and thus arrive at the deepest level of analysis. But, by studying culture as a "semiotic system", and thus attending primarily to what social performances "mean" and "are about", we neglect to consider how a ritual, a harvest, or a story, is experienced "on its own terms". Consequently, while symbolic approaches consider the representations and "meanings" perceived in myths, stories, and social gatherings, they fail to show how these "things"[3], as Geertz calls them, affect their participants. The significance of a funeral, for example, lies for Geertz in its bounded meaning, and not in how the presence of death might engage, trouble, or disturb relatives and friends.[4] Concealed in these kinds of descriptions are the emotional forces and visceral understandings that shape how people confront, make sense of, and mourn the loss of a close relative or friend. When social life is "conceived as organised in terms of symbols", when the "rapture of being alive" is reduced to a mixed-bag of icons and signs, we leave a great deal out.

Similarly, to speak of development in terms of symbolic form, perception, and interpretation, as opposed to talk about it in terms of performance, sentience, and experience, also entails a great loss. Basically, the significance of harvesting, dancing, or digging a ditch, get reduced to simply meaning and representation, and not on how they might engage, amuse, and delight its participants. In his book, *The Body and Emotion*, Robert Desjarlais notes that "our understanding of a people's ethos is not necessarily limited to analytic insights. We can also begin to sense, through non-verbal, visceral means, something of a people's sensibilities by attending to the patterns, orientations, and concerns that commonly impact on their lives."[5] Culture is, after all, about appreciation and comprehension, about empathic forms of understanding that engage not just

an intellectual approach but also call for a visceral comprehension. I believe that we can enter into a much richer conversation across cultures if we use an approach that focuses on people's senses. For instance, we can learn about health and "well being" as it is lived and encountered, getting a feel for the piercing effects of joy, comfort, and pleasure, that are often bounded in moments of salubrity. We can also develop some appreciation for poverty as a sensory condition, attending to the worries and unwelcome anxiety that "low standards of living" are known to occasion. "A concern with the bones", writes Kapferer, "ignores the flesh and blood, the spirit and vitality of form."[6]

From January to April 1994 I visited Rio Negro, a small community of Mexican *campesinos* who make a living from the cultivation of coffee in the state of Chiapas. I found that the culture of an ethnographer who was brought up in an age of mechanical reproduction varies greatly when contrasted with one of a rural village where local experience is informed (and expressed) by a particular system of "aesthetic" value. The clash of views and cultural understandings is most vividly expressed in the way local villagers and visiting government agronomers confront, make sense of, and define coffee cultivation. While agronomers treat coffee cultivation from a technical point of view and as a mere economic activity (i.e. raising yields while preventing soil erosion), villagers from Rio Negro experience their fields in more vital ways and as an integral part of a larger cosmology. Coffee fields in Rio are like a busy "intersection"[7] where social dynamics are created, power relations played out, religious beliefs rehearsed, space imagined, and gender enacted. For instance, don Francisco invites only certain relatives to share his crops, shows his appreciation to the "spirit of the earth" after each harvest, and is able to maintain his fields because his wife stays in the village to attend house-chores. How can we begin to improve the quality of life of a local community by introducing them to an advanced market economy if we do not even have a basic grasp of what locals find most significant about their

experience as coffee cultivators? Gregory Bateson once wrote: "Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality."[8] Similarly, to alter the dynamics of coffee cultivation and modify the economic base of a mountain village without attending to the "framework of learning", entails changing the larger cultural dynamics in which agricultural practices, and Rio's identity, are embedded. What follows is an attempt to spell out this larger context and so gain insight into how coffee is interrelated to religious, social, political, and community life.

The intent of this work is, then, to make sense of how Rio's ways of being, feeling, and acting, tie into the cultivation of coffee, and how a better comprehension of this may lead to more integral forms of development that seek to contribute to people's sense of pleasure, joy, and comfort. To find out what people find significant in life we need to sketch the "cultural sensibilities" that animate and inform local experience, attending to the salient cultural forms and "embodied values" that inform how locals talk, relate to village members, asses an economic opportunity, and experience everyday life.

Johnson's book, *The Body in the Mind*, seems helpful here. He attempts to sketch a "geography of human experience" that "seeks to identify the chief contours (structures) and connections that our experience and understanding exhibit." Johnson tries to comprehend how the basic, nonpropositional dimension of human imagination shapes our understanding of logic, rationality, and deductive process. He finds that truth and meaning are not simple relations "between symbolic representations and objective (mind-independent) reality", but rather that certain "embodied schematas" help structure human experience. These schemata, which vary from our sense of "balance" to the "experiential gestalt" of containment, emerge from physical experience and then get projected metaphorically onto abstract meanings and rational connections. For instance, our bodily sense of space, force, and kinesthetic balance, influence which metaphors we find salient for defining moral boundaries, intentionality, and the notion of equality.

Most important, Johnson points out that many of our basic orientations towards the world stem from tacit bodily forces rather than from propositional, rational, and objective categories. This shift of analysis, from the rational *idea* to the visceral *sense* of force, is a significant tack in methodology. It breaks away from objectivist accounts which "have a tendency to interpret embodied experience in terms of cognitive and linguistic models of meaning."[9] Through his "geography" Johnson pries an opening into the study of experience as a phenomenological condition, allowing us to hearken on humans as sentient beings that comprehend with the body as much as they understand with the mind. Seen in this light, an ethnography of felt experience becomes a type of *fühlen-Verstehen*, a task of emphatic and vicarious understanding of "how an individual as embedded in a (linguistic) community, a culture, and a historical context, understands."[10] Like Johnson, I feel the need to get at the cultural schemas and embodied values that animate Rio's experience --to see the living man move inside his suit.[11]

Choosing felt experience as the focus of this work should not be taken to mean that I am essentializing a subject's culture. My concern is to contribute to a body of literature[12] whose concern "is neither to prove that the primitive is wrong nor to side with him against us, but to set itself up on a ground where we shall both be intelligible without any reduction or rash transportation."[13] I seek to explore, then, the character of felt experience, not human nature.

But since forms of understanding are particular to people's experiences, we must attend to the cultural differences between city-people and rural Mexican *campesinos*, especially when this involves a comparison between literate city-people and an oral-rural society like Rio Negro. Sentiments of fear, joy, and suffering, may be grounded in particular nerve endings and thus may be felt across cultures. But the cultural sensibilities that give charge to these feelings, animate their volition, and ultimately help mitigate their force, may not coincide across cultures.[14]

The Setting

In the wake of an ecological crisis and a rising concern for the environment, the Mexican government has reacted by giving more incentives (and offering less restraints) to the protection of the nation's ecosystems. Mexico's move to enter into the North American Free Trade Agreement, coupled with national environmental activism, has instigated the government to create many new natural parks.[15] Of the 92 parks that have been declared since 1985, twelve biosphere reserves have been established across the country. One of the most important biospheres is *El Triunfo*, in Chiapas. It is a mountainous region of rich genetic diversity that spreads over 120,000 hectares of deep ravines and steep hills, an impressive geographical layout that serves as a giant sponge which captures a significant percentage of the total rainfall for the whole state of Chiapas. The great number of tributaries that originate in the region constitute a strategic source of water that feeds one of Mexico's most important rivers: *Rio Grijalba*, where sixty percent of the nation's total electric energy is produced.

Over the past ten years or so, *El Triunfo* has been the goal of a development project that tries to integrate social and economic objectives within an ecological framework. Inside the biosphere lie a series of human settlements: *fincas*[16], ranches, and numerous communities of rural *campesinos* that cultivate coffee for a living. Rio Negro, the village where I conducted my research, is one of these communities, located almost at the heart of the Reserve at the end of a dirt road that winds through the mountains. For the past four years, the community has been approached by government agronomers. Their goal is to help Rio become self sustainable by, among other things, diversifying their agricultural practices away from coffee monocropping and introducing them to the cultivation of staple foods (i.e. tomatoes, onions, fruits, radishes). To avoid disrupting the ecology of the soil, the agronomers have also been working on introducing villagers to organic forms of cultivating coffee. The project is well-intended and profits are

beginning to show. However, the introduction of the community into an advanced market economy has been done with little consideration for how development changes could disrupt the cultural dynamics that give health and well being to people. One of the goals of this work is to illustrate how moments of health and illness are bounded within a larger sphere of cultural practice and value, and how these conditions tie into coffee cultivation and Rio's identity.

Rio Negro is a craggy village located in the south-west corner of Chiapas, perched at an altitude of approximately one thousand meters above sea level in a Misty Forest almost bordering Guatemala. (see figure 1) To the north and south of the village lies the sharp ridges and rugged topography of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas, a segment of mountains which constitutes part of the massive mountain range that stretches along the entire American Continent, connecting Alaska and Tierra del Fuego. To the east, beyond the foot of the sierra, extends the central plateau of the state. For Rio Negro, like the rest of the coffee-communities that lie on the eastern flank of the Sierra, the east represents the only means of communication to urban areas. This is so because the chain of mountains that stretch from north to south serves as a natural geographical division that separates the west coast of Chiapas from the inner eastern plateau. Although plans are underway, no road has yet been built across the mountains. Thus, the communities that are established furthest up the slope of the sierra, such as Rio Negro, are considered frontier towns. One way of reaching the western plains of the pacific coast on the other side of the sierra is to trek through the intricate mule-paths that extend beyond the crest of the mountains. The alternative is to circumvent the sierra by way of Tuxtla, the capital of Chiapas, and connect to the Pan-American Highway that coasts the Pacific Ocean.

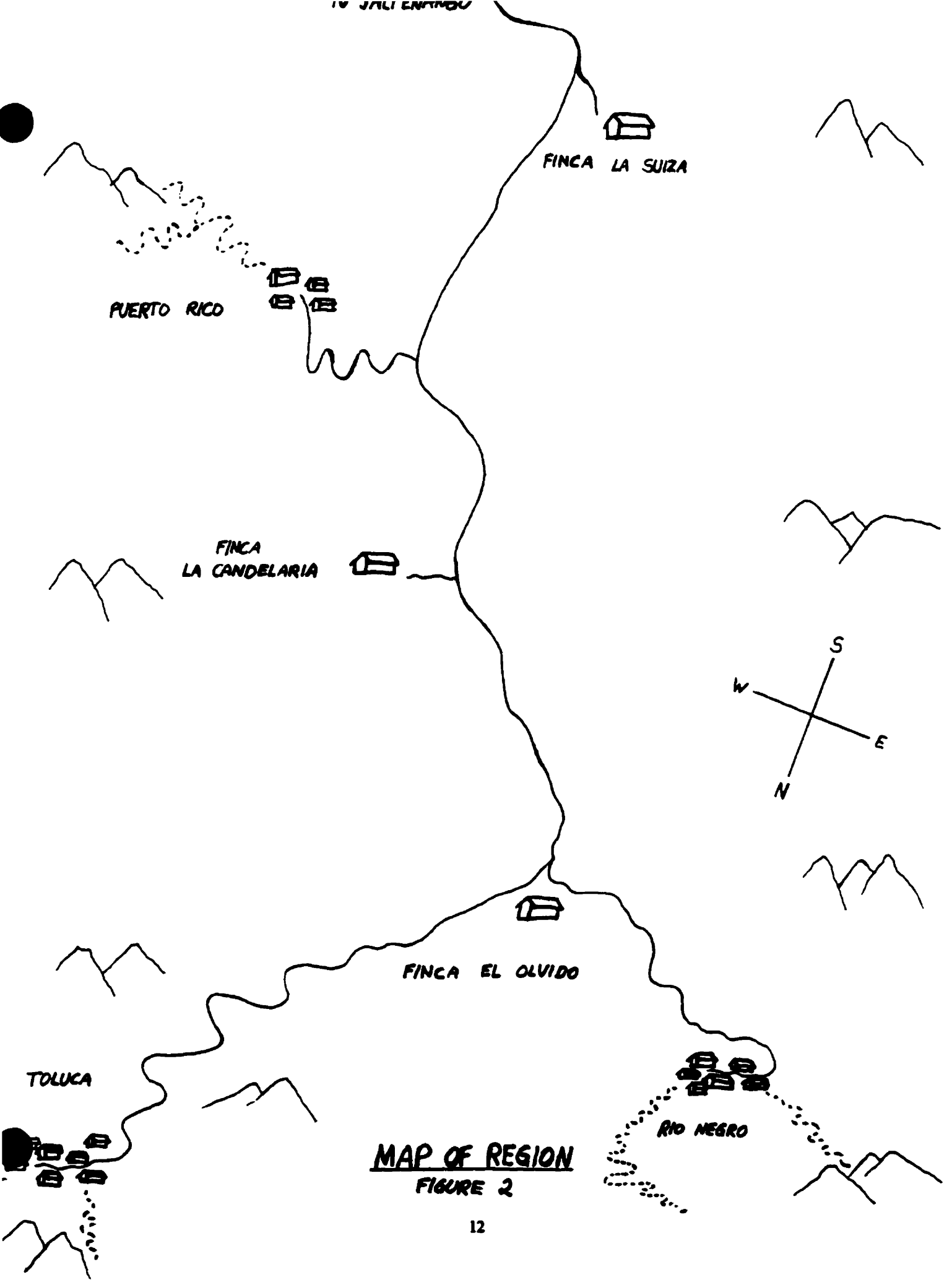
The hamlet is an asymmetrical ensemble of some twenty-seven adobe houses. It sits on a hilly terrain facing a narrow valley which is currently being used to graze cattle by powerful ranchers. (see figure 2) It is perched half-way up a steep mountain and is flanked on both sides by two gullies, each of them with a small running river. The river on the east side is considered part of

Rio's territory and locals use it for washing their clothes, drinking water, bathing, and to clean their coffee-berries during the harvesting season. It is also an identity source for Rio Negro (*Black River*) since the town was named after the dark colour of the river's water. The river on the western gully, on the other hand, is used to a minimum since it constitutes the only water source for Puerto Rico, a neighbouring community located an hour's walk down the valley.

Rio Negro is completely surrounded by coffee parcels that extend into the neighbouring hills and down to the foot of the mountain where the valley begins. Since locals do not demarcate their parcels with artificial divisions to distinguish their fields but simply use particular land-marks (i.e. a rotting log or a large rock), a visitor's first impression of the area is one of a large and continuous plantation that extends over the hilly terrain of the region. It is only after someone points out these tacit divisions that separate fields become visible and comprehensible.

The fields spread outward from the periphery of the village. The parcels closest to the town belong to the founders of Rio Negro or to one of their family members who inherited parts of lands, a short and convenient distance relay coffee sacks between house and parcel. Short distances is an advantage for locals because it saves them time while sparing them form the hardships of having to carry home heavy loads of coffee from distant places. The plots farther away, sometimes over an hour walk, are owned by farmers who arrived late to the repartition of land and had to settle for what was left available.

Since the optimum condition for growing coffee is a cool shade, farmers shield their coffee plants from the sun's hot rays by letting wild and domesticated trees grow randomly throughout their fields. The effect is particular: the canopies of the trees intertwine into a kind of top mantle that spreads well above the coffee plants, creating a natural green roof that casts shadow onto the hill while allowing the breeze to blow through the fields to ventilate the plants. Apparently, this prevents the reproduction of pests. While some trees were already there before the farmers began cultivating the hills, others have been introduced and planted according to their selective use (i.e.



MAP OF REGION
FIGURE 2

fruit and lumber trees). The scattered trees that stand in each parcel also anchor the soil with their roots and prevent it from being washed away down the steep slopes, especially during the rainy season (June to August) when the town receives between 2500-4000 ml[17] in torrents that wash down the steep hills.

Besides providing coffee plants with shade and maintaining the soil humid and cool, trees also have a home-use. After the harvesting season of coffee is over, sometime in late May, when locals have finished selling their grain for that year, the men groom their fields and prune the overgrowth of large trees. Once the overgrown branches have been cut and have fallen to the ground, the branches are then gathered sporadically throughout the year and carried to town to kindle the stoves and heat the earthen ovens. This is a responsibility usually reserved for young boys, girls, and women. In Rio Negro, there is a strong division of labour according to gender and age groups. While girls help their mothers cook, bake, clean, and wash, young boys relay messages between houses, recollect wild foods, and fetch wood in the coffee fields. Men are in charge of looking after the fields, commercialising the family's coffee, and working for paid labour after the rainy season is over, when difficult financial times set in.

Since coffee fields vary in quality as much as in size, some fields are too small and do not hold the sufficient number of trees that are needed to meet a family's demand for firewood. Families who own less than four acres of land do not manage to supply their houses with all the wood they need for the whole year and, consequently, are forced to rely on relatives and friends for access to other people's fields. Asking permission to collect wood from another field, like any other favour, is often underscored by moral and ethical notions of personhood, of what it entails to be a "good" or "bad" neighbour. Depending on how people are related and how much wood is collected during the year, villagers tacitly assess the gesture and, ideally, try to "reciprocate" (*corresponder*) in ways that show a similar disposition. How people make sense of their actions and those of others is one of the main concerns of this work..

Methodology

Since our concern lies with how villagers perceive, feel, confront, and ascribe meaning to the world, this narrative begins at the plane of experience --an attempt to base our account (often tacitly, always partially) on the local gestalt that patterns how reports are uttered, sentiments expressed, and embodied gestures transacted. The essay is about the emotional discourse that patterns the cultivation of coffee in the way (or, better, in my understanding of how) villagers of Rio Negro experienced it: how and why was coffee adopted and still maintained as the main crop, how pressing concerns of economic austerity affect how people make decisions, and how social tensions --from community obligations to family strives-- bond individuals into particular clans. To convey the felt quality of people's experiences, I use Desjarlais' "archaeology of feelings", to use his words. Briefly put, it is a "phenomenology of embodied aesthetics" that concentrates on the play between image, feelings, and experience, from the cultural forces that shape, make sense of, and charge feelings of despair, anxiety, and salubrity, to the "sociocultural institutions"[18] that assuage the pains and vital disposition bounded in these sentiments. How do local ways of being, knowing, and feeling, tie into experiences of commitment, financial indebtedness, or moments of health?

Since 'ways of being' are not "free-floating but are driven by social dynamics that influence the very marrow of experience"[19], one of the central points of this work is to place emotions squarely in the centre of social practices and the natural environment that constitutes them. In this way emotions may be seen as sentiments that get their force and meaning from their location and performance in the "public realm of discourse" --as enacted and used rather than as static codes "analyzable apart from social practice."[20] I take 'discourse' as a point of entry into the study of emotions for several reasons. First, emotions must be understood not simply as internal states, irrational, and neutral; but as shaped by social idioms of communications that affect social practices

(i.e. an avoiding gaze from a woman to represent the imposition of moral behaviour on attitudes of women towards men). Second, the temporality implicit in discourse allows us to see emotions as "forces" that wax and wane over time rather than seeing them as static and homogeneous units. The focus here is to treat emotions as vital forces: to convey some of the intensity bounded in emotions on a moment-for-moment basis, getting a "feel for" how the piercing effect of pain enters the body in moments of sorrow, how it inhabits it while grieving, and how it assuages local anatomies to restore health and salubrity. Third, discourse also breaks away from the terms culture and ideology as definable categories that connote certain coherence, uniformity, and timelessness. This approach sees meaning in practice where rhetorics of power and contradictory discourses are negotiated in a continuously changing situation[21], allowing us to move away from a monolithic view of culture, and to see it as a changing and dynamic process.

Abu-Lughod writes that focusing on discourse allows not only insight into "how emotion is informed by cultural themes and values", but it also shows how emotion "serves as an operator in a contentious field of social activity, how it affects a social field, and how it can serve as in idiom of communicating, not even necessarily about feelings but about such diverse matters as social conflict, gender roles, or the nature of the ideal or deviant person."[22] In Rio Negro, social ideals of honesty, integrity, and dignity, mark cultural notions of trust and friendship. A friend who wants to live up to what his or her social role entails will work through these cultural understandings to try and behave in ways that contribute to these sentiments. Seen from this light, emotions are not simply a reaction to what happens but "interpretations of an event, judgements about situations."[23]

Once we grasp the cultural character of an emotion, how people use and assess the impact emotions deliver, we can begin to understand them as potent idioms of communication that affect how relatives plea for favours, friends show their affection and disposition to help, and people pay respect to their elders by adding the prefix "don" when calling on their name. The advantage of this approach is that we can place emotions within the larger social context we are studying and thus

explore how local concepts of emotions borrow from "broader cultural themes that reflect, in their ideological shape, the forms of indigenous social relationships."[24] This means that we can comprehend the realities of others not by applying wholesale Western categories on body, speech, and mind, but by working from the "ground up" and attend to how local experience contributes to notions of personhood and personal identity. In my estimation, one of the problems of 'sustainable development' is that the methodology it uses to interpret the 'expressed wishes of the recipients', lacks a consideration for the local system which natives use to define themselves to themselves[25]. In the words of Lutz, we "psychologize others", making a "concept-for-concept" translation; i.e. Western notions of depression become native's "soul loss", poverty becomes misfortune, etc.

Note that although I use "discourse" as the point of entry to this study, my treatment of it varies from the way it is treated by most of the literature. For instance, Abu-Lughod, following Foucault, recommends that we treat emotion as a "discoursive practice", attending to language as spoken rather than "said". She believes that if we approach emotion in this manner --for "what discourse is, what it does, and what forms it"-- we can understand how the force of an emotion acts on people. Abu-Lughod sets out to study the "discourse of love"[26] in an Egyptian community and finds that "love-poetry" is used by young people as a "discourse of rebellion", as a vehicle to express sentiments of love that "challenge the social system and the authority of elders"[27]. Apparently, young people who use love-poetry to "assert their freedom" from elders "are not just tolerated" but, according to the author's interpretation, are "actually admired." She concludes that this "ambivalence about love-poetry --the discomfort surrounding it on the one hand, and its glorification on the other-- reflects a fundamental tension in the organization of Bedouin social and political life."[28] Whether the cultural sensibilities that lend value to people's motives to sing love-poetry have more to do with the preoccupations of the author than with the Bedouins people themselves, is difficult to say.

But to focus on how language is spoken, rather than on what is being "said", does not go far enough. With Abu-Lughod's account we learn that reciting love-poetry among Bedouin people carries ethical and moral undertones of "rebellion" and "self-assertion". She recognises that the efficacy of these rebellions is not so much on what they "mean" or "represent", but on the emotional impact they deliver. Yet, her account only "tells" us about the felt quality of these experiences and why we need to consider them as such, but it does not "show" us, in any significant way, how moments of "discomfort" and "disapproval" might feel like to the people living them. Discourse, then, reveals a web of somatic, social, and political forces that act on people, but it fails to convey how these forces, in their sensory form, are felt and expressed by the participants themselves. Above all, to reduce love-poetry to rhetorical strategies only, to a mechanics detached from the heart, would do justice to neither the people signing them nor to the people to which the songs are intended. With her account we miss on the pleasure, joy, and lust that, ultimately, charges love with value and significance. In my estimation, reciting love-poetry may spark feelings of "disapproval" and "discomfort" between the young and the elders, but the value of the experience does not reside in creating distances and antagonisms. To miss how love is integral, encompassing, and empathic, is to miss on a great deal.

Since experience not only occurs within a social setting but is also influenced by the particulars of a place, we must be equally attentive to how space is imagined, adobe houses built, and the intricate web of mountain paths that connect sister communities experienced. The way the village is laid-out, the hilly terrain that hearths it, and the "misty mountain forest" that locals inhabit, are, for them, a representative part of the real world rather than "a great outdoor museum", as most ecotourists who visit the reserve come to experience it. I once made a comparison between the flat landscape that characterises eastern Canada to the jagged terrain of the sierra where Rio Negro sits. After listening to my comment, a local replied in a conclusive tone: "So, this is still what is normal." I had no response.

Locals' conceptions of the land work in specific ways to shape the conceptions of themselves. In Rio, there are particular features in the landscape that act as "situating devices", reminding the people about "the system of rules and values according to which villagers expect each other to organise and regulate their lives."[29] For instance, there is a wooden cross that sits next to a path not far from the town, marking the spot where a man (from a sister community) had been killed a year before my arrival to Rio Negro. He had been stabbed to death by a man from Rio because he, the deceased, "was always exhibiting his pride to others, bragging and cheating on the people that helped him." Apparently, on the night of his death, he stumbled onto a man to whom he owed some money and, unapologetic for the disturbance he had caused to the lender's family, said he had no intentions of paying anything back. According to one local, "he not only refused to honour his debts but even threaten to kill if he was not left alone." The men argued and the machetes swung. The next morning he was found dead on the path. Since "everybody in the town knew the kind of man he was, there was no need to call for the intervention of the federal police". The matter was settled among the people of the town and minimal land compensations were paid to the family of the deceased.

The cross, I believe, serves to remind bypassers of an anecdote of moral implications, of a story about maintaining equilibrium in social life by controlling the expression of personal desires that may run against the social grain; in this case, the expression of greed and pride at the expense of social harmony and honouring personal debts. If a landmark such as the cross embodies (meta-)narratives of moral value, can the parcels where locals cultivate their corn and coffee also incarnate specific conceptions about what it means to be a proper *campesino*? The task is to see how local ways of conceiving the environment are relevant to an understanding about man-land relationships, and how, in turn, relationships of land-man work to influence patterns of social actions. Specifically, I wish to concentrate on the play between cultural notions of land and

emotional distress, from the cultural forces that mould and make sense of experience, to the way local *campesinos* attend to these felt understandings.

But the question remains: how to articulate what lies "on the hidden side of words" onto the fixity of a few words on a page? How to grasp the experience of a rural *campesino*, in its sensory form, and then render it back in the written form? James Fernandez[30] finds that when lacking a common meta-narrative to translate across cultures it is useful to "give primacy to the imagination", attending to the effects and impressions that particular "image compositions" evoke in readers. By verbally "pictorializing our topic" through the aid of visual language, and considering the "grammar by which these images are conjoined and transformed", it is possible to recover the context "in which primary perceptions are evoked". I intend to conduct my work along these lines, "transfigurating"[31] the imagery that animates these primary perceptions from Mexican to Canadian culture so that, in the end, the reader may sense and evaluate their poignancy and significance.

My role is to act as a translocutor betwixt and between cultures, attending to the concrete manifestations that specific imagery evokes from people (the fear summoned by the presence of a hungry ghost, the salubrity generated by a colourful scenario of health). Similar to the way a ray of "light penetrates a window to illuminate a house's interiors"[32], so can the play of socially derived images, cultural metaphors, and allegories in action, give us insights into the grammars of Rio's culture --into the gist of a joke, the cadence of a greeting. Fortunately, we cannot "live another people's lives"[33], thus leaving a couple of hidden drawers soundly uninspected. But if there is an "inside to experience as well as an outside"[34] (namely, a private experience that marks the seat of our individuality and one that is social), we could sit and "listen to what, in words, in images, in actions, locals say about their lives."[35]

Chapter Two

The Aesthetics of Everyday Life

House-poor, indebted, and about to harvest his four acres of land, don Hilario, an older village member, fell ill and remained in bed for three consecutive days. I visited the second day: I found him wrapped in filthy blankets in an adobe room that was dimly lit, sombre, and cool. The smoke of the kitchen fire wafted into the room through the unsealed cracks of a cheap carton door that was half-hanging and precariously held together; it impregnated the room with a smell of stuffy and stagnant air. After one of his daughters had whooshed the chickens out of the room and brought in a chair for me to sit, he ordered her to kindle the fire and reheat some coffee.

I sat next to don Hilario on a home-made wooden stool and began a trivial conversation while I drank my coffee. After a while, I inquired about his health condition and asked him if he would be participating in the harvesting of his plot, which was supposed to begin in about four days or less. With uncombed hair, an opaque gaze, and a languid speech, he illustrated an etiology of anxiety and despair while he laid in his bed, a bunch of coffee sacks stacked together on a compacted earthen floor. He repeatedly lamented his precarious financial situation and complained about the economic pressures he was facing. Besides having to meet the family's needs and making the payments of last year's debts, he also needed to make some savings for the rainy season when food and employment become scarce. Apparently, don Hilario's harvest did not look as prosperous as last year's, and he worried that he would not be able to pay back his debts in time, a default that would bring him "shame" and a reputation of a "bad debtor among the people he knew". "A man without a word of honour", he feared, "is untrustworthy. No one takes him seriously."

Apparently, what afflicted don Hilario the most was that Félix, his oldest and hardest working son, was not going to be able to help him with the harvesting of the family's plot due to an accident he, the son, had suffered. Don Hilario complained that without his son's help he was

forced to hire, feed, and house a day-labourer for two consecutive weeks, an expense that the family could barely afford.

Don Hilario had fallen ill four days later after Félix, who was carrying a heavy sack of coffee and wearing a pair of gripless plastic shoes, slipped down a steep slope and sprained his ankle; an accident that kept him in the house for twenty-three working days. Hiring and feeding a Guatemalan labourer to replace Félix, plus the pressure of raising some money to pay for the cost of sending his son to a nearby chiropractor, amounted to some unexpected expenses that don Hilario could not meet without "compromising"[1] part of his harvest at half-price. Compromising his coffee at such bargain prices so early into the season meant a great deal to don Hilario and his family, especially since the berries had not even been picked from the trees yet and needed harvesting. For one thing, he could not afford the annual supply of corn and beans that the family needed to get through the year. Deciding to compromise his coffee also meant that he was back in the debt cycle once again, with the whole family bearing the burdens of going barefoot, collecting wild food to feed themselves, and having no alternative but to rely on relatives for favours.

Ten days after my first visit, don Hilario and the rest of the villagers, stumbled onto some unexpected sources of government credit. The federal government, in its attempt to maintain control over rural unrest and soothe the rage of dissatisfied peasants who threaten to join the Zapatistas if their conditions were not improved, improvised credit-packages and began funnelling them to the remotest areas of Chiapas; including Rio Negro and the nearby communities. Each *campesino* received seven hundred thousand pesos in compensation for a "poor year of harvesting", or about one third of a yearly income. Apparently, this unforeseen money helped to mitigate some the pressure that was afflicting don Hilario, making him feel more appeased and less troubled. He seemed to be especially relieved to know that with this new money he would be able to pay his debts and "not have to rely on his relatives for borrowed money", as he put it.

I begin with this anecdote because it exposes some of the most fundamental concerns of this work: the basic tenets running through the everyday life of indebted farmers, the embodiment of pain, and the resolutions (at least partially) of these tensions. This passage also conveys a little about how people in Rio Negro make sense of moments of austerity and how they go about recuperating their vital disposition to engage back in work. But before we can start assessing how don Hilario was afflicted by the loss of his son, or how he recuperated his conviction to work when he stumbled onto unexpected sources of credit, we must first look at how people in Rio Negro construe and experience their bodies in everyday life --how he or she experience pain, salubrity, or gender. This does not mean that I will jump into the muddy terrain of so called "experience-near"[2] ethnographies and apply wholesale Western categories on indigenous forms of understanding. Instead, I want to begin from the other end of the spectrum, to try to map out the "common graces and embodied values that govern how villagers go about their lives, walk down a hillside, or talk with neighbours; the forms and sensibilities that contribute to the sensory grounds"[3] of an indebted *campesino* or an energetic person. What are some of the common concerns that pattern the lives of local *campesinos*? Why did don Hilario fear to ask a relative for borrowed money? In this way we will not just be calling out the sounds and smells of a Mayan village by first impression, but rather, we will work within the culture in question and see how local cultural sensibilities and embodied values act as the "building-blocks" to sensory experience. Sensations are essential in Rio's daily life, but these experiences "only make sense to participants through the values and grammars specific to a people."[4] If this is so, then I suspect that what is needed is to sketch the contours of Rio's culture to arrive at a basic understanding of the long social history (i.e. including a colonial past) that patterns how villagers make sense of their experience, whether they converse, redistribute the harvesting rights, or assess troubled times.

To do this we first attend to the imaginative structures that animate sensory experience and mould a people's moral system. These aesthetic values and moral constraints, I suggest, stem from

the exigencies of daily social life. Isser tells us that "aesthetic value is like the wind, we know of its existence only through its effects."[5] Indeed, we may develop some appreciation for the cadence of a greeting by attending to its effects on its participants, but it is also important to know why one greets and what this entails. How are these aesthetic values contested and redefined as they are played out in practice? Just as the meaning of a story resides "not in the original but in the present tellings", so do the meanings of graces and embodied values "respond to shifting cultural and historical contexts"[6] that are particular to a time and place.

This chapter, then, begins to map-out the physiologic dimension of embodied aesthetics and the moral propensity that constrains local forms of expression and style. Since the focus of this work is to avoid imposing our cultural categories onto others, I will work from the "ground-up" and attend to how people in Rio Negro work through a system of aesthetic value to define their reality. My use of the term "aesthetics" borrows form the way Desjarlais defines it. Aesthetics, he maintains, is not meant to "define any overt artistry or performative genres --art, music, poetry-- but rather to grasp (and tie together) the tacit leitmotifs that shape cultural constructions of bodily and social interactions. I see such aesthetics forms --which include, [for the people of Rio, values of integrity, harmony, and completion]-- as embodied through the visceral experience of cultural actors rather than articulated through concrete artistic or philosophic tenets. With the term "aesthetics of experience", then, I refer to the tacit cultural forms, values, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences."[7] Don Hilario, for instance, worked through a cultural system of aesthetic value to make sense of his discomfort of having to rely on a relative for borrowed money. His fear and anxiety, for example, were grounded in local notions of personhood, of what it entailed to be a man of honour and integrity. "Being bounded by moral obligations", Johnson maintains, "involves being within a metaphorical space where forces of moral constraint act upon you."[8] A prelude that sketches the felt quality of Rio's moral topography, for instance, may help us understand why was don Hilario so reluctant to ask a relative for borrowed

money; a requisition that don Hilario entertained in discomfort and uneasiness because of the ethical undertones that such favour a entailed.

In Rio, asking for borrowed money is not free-floating but entails a position in public discourse, a sentient interpretation of events where, both lender and receiver, are bounded by a moral space where notions of responsibility, honesty, and obligation, act as forces upon the subjects. While relatives are expected to lend money and assist others in times of need, debtors must also conform to the ethical obligations to pay back. Otherwise, debtors may spoil their reputation and that of the whole family, bringing shame and "distrust" onto all members. "If you don't pay back, people will lose trust in you. Even friends will not respect you much." Someone who honours his or her debts, on the other hand, is considered a person of trust and integrity. Morality is especially poignant in Rio because the town does not resort to the use of the national legal system to regulate internal life. Instead, they rely on a set of cultural norms that act, and are enforced at, a moral and ethical plane; someone who is not able to pay his debts in time may feel the embarrassment of shame, eroding his sense of integrity and "his word of honour".

Seen from this light, the penalties for default (which include: sculling, distrust, and a lack of respect) make more sense if we treat them as bodily experiences, assessing how the effects of sculling work on the bodies of people by inflicting feelings of shame and distrust. In fact, the Mexican government has been using this strategy as a way to guarantee loan payments when credits are given out to rural *campesinos*. With the social program *Credito de la Palabra* (Credit by Word of Honour), *campesinos* are eligible for loans from the government on the condition that, if and when payments are not honoured, their names would be displayed on a list in a public place, usually on the outside of the town's school or church. With the approach I suggest here, attending to the felt quality of experience, we can begin to map out the cultural sensibilities that pattern moments of shame and thus make sense of the discomfort and uneasiness that this entails. After all, it is this felt quality of shame

and disgrace that the strategy of the government is trying to get at, "shaming *campesinos* into paying their debts", as one of the agronomers of the Reserve put it.

Don Hilario, for instance, feared asking a relative for borrowed money because of the embarrassment and shame that this would entail. As it was, he already owed money to the government, relatives, and a middleman. The felt quality of his experience (pain and anxiety) and the embodied values that constrained his sense of personhood (shame, distrust) were antagonistic to the moral ideals that underscore feelings of honesty and integrity. His fears and anxiety, as I read it, were occasioned by an unexpected financial pressure that put him in a position where he could not live up to his social role --he could not pay back his debts in time and honour his reputation as a man of trust. Likewise, he recuperated his disposition to work when he learned of the government credits, alleviating him from the anxiety that put him in despair. This anecdote shows us some of the criteria on which perceptions of health and discomfort are based, how the efficacy of feelings of shame and distrust tie into cultural understandings of integrity, dignity, and honour. Seen from this light, the sensibilities of don Hilario's malaise are a question of aesthetic value. To understand the poignancy of his anxiety and how effective his recovery was, we need to attend to the underlying causes of his illness, from the words that gave imagery to his illustration of malaise to the values that gave form to his restoration of health.

So far, I have mentioned that notions of health are underscored by feelings of integrity, showing how don Hilario's fear and anxiety tied into local concepts of fragmentation, untrustworthiness, and dishonour. This shows how human experience, case the culture of the Mexican *campesino*, is variably composed within a particular cultural setting of moral, philosophic, and political value. In the subsequent section I will examine, in more detail, how the basic "building blocks" of integrity and cohesion work through an aesthetic system to contribute to local compositions (and conceptions) of health and well being.

***Animos* as Sensory Forces**

One way in which the Reserve has changed the culture of Rio is in the re-working of the town's ethnic identity. As part of the program to commercialise coffee and modernise the community, the agronomers of the reserve are encouraging local *campesinos* to change the way they present themselves. Agronomers believe that if villagers present themselves as *cafeticultores* instead of *campesinos*, they will create a favourable impression on the business men that buy their grains. "The term *cafeticultor*", an agronomer explained to refer to the differences to that of a *campesino*, "is something more specific, it sounds more technical and professional." Consequently, local villagers, who have recently being introduced to television and its propaganda, have increasingly been using the term "*cafeticultor*" when they travel outside the village to sell their coffee.

Among themselves, however, farmers continue to refer to each other as "*campesinos*". As I see it, the decision to call each other *campesinos* is intended to situate themselves within the traditional cultural boundaries that define the Mexican *campesinato*, an aesthetic system that shapes the moral value and emotional force of the experience in ways that are particular to Rio's "grammars of experience". In so doing, people of Rio Negro compose, manage, and evaluate their actions by working through a local lens of aesthetic value that sets the criteria upon which judgements of ugliness, health, and proper behaviour are made.

But since moments of health and local styles of greeting are not neutral, but entail a posture toward the world, a "gut feeling", they engage not only an intellectual approach, but call for a visceral, emotional, and moral stand. In coming to understand the embodied values of a Mexican *campesino* we cannot simply "map a society's system of beliefs", report on its symbolic meanings, and expose its deep psychological processes. It is also important that we attend to the cultural sensibilities, felt qualities, and embodied values intrinsic in times of health and distress. The focus here, then, is on the way in which people of Rio Negro offer help, recollect firewood, or "put

together" a birthday reception, and on the somatic "constraints on form and style that underlie"[9] such cultural interactions.

I suspect that villagers of Rio call each other *campesinos* to allude to common realms of experience and thus "jumpstart" an aesthetic system where notions of personhood, grace, and value, govern a person's sense of what is proper, tasteful, and healthy. One of the main values that underscores the everyday life of Mexican *campesinos* concerns local notions of health and well being. For villagers of Rio Negro, as for most people in the region, health implies not only well-being on an individual scale, but also entails that one's family, social, and cosmic relations proceed with grace and harmony. If a person is lethargic, morose, and apathetic, he or she is considered to be disjunctive and ill, unable to properly engage in work and relate to family members and friends. "One's body becomes lazy", as don Hilario described the effects, "always wanting to stay home and rest". This condition brings unwelcome pensiveness and an inability to communicate these feelings to others, a sort of retreat into the depths of one's body that brings isolation and a sense of detachment form one's family and friends.

A person who is considered salubrious and healthy, on the other hand, is said to have *animos* and a general sense of purpose in life. *Animos* (literally: animated spirits) is a Spanish term that refers to the vital essence of a living person on which other physiological functions rest (volition, vigour, lust, and motivation). *Animos* are vital forces that bestow volition to the body and will to the mind. It is a spiritual essence that gives impetus and force to engage in life --the vital disposition to pull early form bed, walk up a hill, and harvest ripe coffee berries. "*Animos* are always good", a local told me once during a community basketball tournament, "because they give you energy to play faster and better."

Anne West[10], talking about art and perception, suggests that creation is an alternating process that is undivided. "There is no harmonious image", she writes, "but a visible world that is multiple and changing." The same applies to *animos:* they are animated energy forces that are

multiple and changing, they enter the body, take certain shape, and fade with time. This demands that we attend to them in a similar fashion to what West suggests, focusing on *animos* as forces and processes rather than units and forms.

Since *animos* are fluid and can be lost or induced, villagers try to engage in activities that are likely to generate these effects. Thus, people in Rio Negro try to achieve a sense of cohesiveness by participating in social gatherings or by taking membership in group activities (basketball teams, "the church", or the local band). Intrinsic to health, then, is a sense of cohesion and compactness which locals try to achieve by gathering into tight family packs, clan groups, or as a community as a whole. "It is better to prune the fields with people you know", Paco said one night, "because they animate you when they yell and joke with you."

During the four months of my visit I witnessed a re-occurring event that did not seem to have any major significance to me. It was not until I came back to Montreal, while sorting out my notes and piecing together the puzzle, that the realisation of the event hit home. Here is what I wrote in my journal while in Rio:

After dusk, when the men have finished 'pulping' the berries and the women have began to boil the corn of tomorrow's meal, the men often stroll the town looking for small informal gatherings that happen outside people's houses. Since tacit clan divisions pattern the town's social life, villagers prefer to stroll in areas where they can expect to find particular friends and *compadres*. The town consists of three main social clans, all which are distributed among three uneven geographic clusters. Since I have been allocated to house with Fulgór and his family I am situated within a particular position in the town's hierarchy. In order not to breach social etiquette and respond to the moral boundaries that confine people's mobility among the clans, I am restricted from seeking membership in other groups. My observations, thus, are mostly based on the interaction of the clan to which Fulgór belongs.

Tonight, like most other nights, people gathered to talk in the front patio outside of Fulgór's house. And like most nights, the goal of the conversation seems to be purely for entertainment purposes. The topic is unimportant as long as the story, tale, or joke, engages the attention of the people present. The greater the effect of the story, the more people value it--and the person telling it. On this occasion, three villagers began a humorous conversation about coffee prices and this year's harvesting yields. Half-joking, but with a hope of truth, they wondered if this year's prices would keep rising now that coffee plantations are being destroyed by the armed conflict in the northern part of the state. Basically, they would speculate about what they would do today if they could sell their coffee at the price of ten years ago. Immediately after Mincho had first introduced the idea with a tone of wishful-thinking, a series of jokes triggered a dynamic of humorous remarks and funny comments. Nestor teased Mincho about his ripped plastic shoes and, in a joking gesture, told him that if he could sell his coffee at the prices of ten years ago "he could afford new shoes and not threaten the people with his toes". They found this utterly funny and roared with laughter. Immediately, Tancho suggested that getting rid of his ripped shoes may not be a good idea after all because, considering the political situation in Chiapas, Mincho could use his toes to scare the Zapatista army in case they threaten to take over the town. For about ten minutes, a streak of jokes followed one after the other, all of them borrowing a theme from the previous

comment and trying to built on the climax of the story. Then, the pauses got longer as the topic became exhausted. The three men remained in the patio for a while longer, trying to start another conversation. However, comments were abrupt and fragmented and no dynamic developed this time. After a long pause of silence, Nestor got on his feet, said farewell for the night, and set off on a path to return home. Not long after, the other men did the same. I came back inside the house to continue on with my work. (Journal entry of March 14)

The way I see it now, the poignancy of this anecdote lies not only with the gist of the jokes themselves, but in the re-occurrence of these social gatherings and villager's propensity to engage in them. These "reunions" provide a forum that often, but not always, "works" to alleviate personal distress. By alternating between reality and fiction (i.e. between harvesting yields and imaginary prices), locals generate an "argument of images"[11] that, if effective, "claws" into people's experiences and activates their imagination in particular ways. The imagery of the above anecdote reveals a scenario of sensory experience where harvesting yields and high market prices induce people to attend to a scenery of abundant wealth, new shoes, and an army retreating in fear. These imagined sensations, depending on individual cases, can "hook" and divert a person's attention to a rich and colourful landscape exterior to his or her own sluggish "sensorium". This shift, I argue, jolts the body and instils a sense of vitality that is absent when a person lacks *animos*. A person who feels detached, morose, and ill, can thus be "awakened" by an array of images that, through their cumulative effect, jumpstart the body and set it on a course for restoring health. However, the efficacy of these narratives is not contingent on the skills of the teller alone, but also depends on how empathic each person relates to the plot of the story. Villagers consider narratives effective if they strike a chord in people's experiences. In this sense, stories are "good" when they jolt the body and alert the senses. "They make people feel more alive", as doña Recuerdos explained the effects.

Seen from this light, the significance of a narrative lies less with the cerebral message it may occasion than with the visceral and emotional impact it delivers. By actively participating in the construction of a (group-)story, always trying to built on the climax, people of Rio engage in an invigorating process of story-telling that, by its mere convivial nature, demands that people be alert,

attentive, and responsive to its unfolding. The imagery of the narrative, to use Coleridge's term, creates "hooked atoms" [12] of resemblance and affinity that alert listeners to the full experience of the story, rather than just its telling. As this suggests, the significance of a story does not only lie with its "symbolic representation" or the "web of meaning" that underlies it; but rather, the efficacy of night gatherings is on how well they entertain, disgust, or delight its participants. In this sense, it is the bodily impact of the ritual, more than its metaphorical structure, that effects change and value. Indeed, when I asked locals about the nature of these gatherings and what they appreciated the most, they alluded to the visceral and the emotional responses that "good" narratives evoked in them. "We like them because they leave us feeling content, with force to work harder!", Nestor said half smiling as he enacted an exaggerated version of his answer. Other times, when narratives involve hungry ghosts and evil spirits, they "frighten and spook people", as we will see in chapter four.

These night-gatherings show cultural values of cohesion and integrity in practice, helping generate feelings of *animos* and salubrity in people. But since these "ways of being" entail a historicity and an informing social past, it is necessary to explore in more detail the political "building blocks" and cultural hues that shade feelings of cohesion and integrity. The gist of the joke of Nestor and the scenario painted by Tancho make reference to a common past that is deeply felt in Rio's everyday life. The next chapter attempts to lay out the context that animates these experiences, focusing on the play between feelings of integration and fragmentation, inside and outside, health and illness.

Chapter Three

From a Social History into a Village Cluster: The Underpinnings of Cohesion and Integrity

One of the main concerns patterning Rio's life has to do with its colonial past. Although the Mexican revolution is often understood as a national phenomenon that swept across the entire nation, its effects were mostly regional and confined to the central and northern parts of Mexico.[1] The southern states of the republic were left untouched in a colonial past of slavery, debt-peonage, and with a powerful oligarchy that acted as both government and patron to a mostly Indian population. It was not until the late 1940s and early 50s that some of the fruits of the revolution began to take effect in southern Mexico, including Chiapas. One of the most influential effects of the revolution was the formulation of Article 27, a constitutional clause that guaranteed all Mexicans a piece of land.

One drizzling morning, don Francisco didn't go to his parcel and stayed home to repair some torn baskets. I asked him to recount his story about how he, and two of his closest *compadres*, settled the region and established Rio Negro. Specifically, I asked him to speak of his experiences as a migrant and recently married man. Apparently, the history of Rio Negro goes back some forty years, when don Francisco, don Elias, and don Genaro, were able to leave the *finca* where they had worked and settle their own land. Referring to Article 27, he explained that while working at the finca, they had learned through word-of-mouth that the federal government was guaranteeing access to land; that "all land-less *campesinos* were legally entitled to property without having to pay for it." For the indigenous families that lived in near slavery conditions in the three fincas down in the valley, the land-guarantees became their emancipation.

According to the three village members, this is the basic context that animated their initial search for land. Without quitting their jobs in La Suiza, a finca located in the most southern part of the valley, the three men discreetly began to search for a place to settle. Since the entire valley and

most of the fertile soils were controlled by the owners of the three fincas, don Francisco and his colleagues decided to explore the slopes of the mountains surrounding it; testing more marginal, less productive, areas of land. Apparently, they had agreed to survey the areas independently, only informing each other when a favourable area was found. Then, as a group, they would visit the areas to survey it, assess its viability, and discuss the possibilities for a potential settlement.

Who exactly 'discovered' the slopes on which Rio now sits was never made clear during the interviews; each of the men recalls being the first person to have spread the news to the others -- an ambiguity which locals use to boost their own prestige. However, they all recall having visited the area together on several occasions, where they meditated over the inclines of the slopes, the fertility of the soils, and the accessibility to fresh water and wild food.

Apparently, the three men initiated their migration from the southern point of the valley. They moved north, crossed the length of the entire valley, and climbed half-way up the face of a distant mountain. There, carved into a steep slope that inclines at approximately thirty degrees angle, they found a combination of elements that set the potential for a settlement: access to running water, fertile soils, and an abundant supply of materials to built a home and sustain a family. When they arrived in the region where Rio now sits, they dispersed into a particular formation and, with some discussion and compromising, they agreed on the extent of land that each would own. Don Elias took over the eastern part of the village. In total, he claimed twenty-four acres of land that went beyond, but did not include, a narrow river that rushes down the eastern gully. Since the property of don Elias first descends the slope of the mountain to the river's edge, and then climbs up the skirts of the opposite mountain, the layout of his territory embraces both sides of the river. As such, villagers have always respected the fields flanking the river as private property, but consider the water to be for communal use. Don Genaro says he claimed an initial eighteen acres of land and, some years later, added another two atop a distant hill. The western flank of the town was claimed by don Francisco, who managed to hold control over thirty acres of

fertile land. I suspect that his ability to hold onto the majority of the land was partly the result of an asymmetrical relation that existed between him and the other two members while they lived in the *finca*. He used to be the foreman to a group of fifteen people, a status of prestige that bought him favourable treatment and reputation. To some extent, I find that the political hierarchy of the *finca* helped set the tone and tempo to the type of relations afterwards in Rio Negro.

Today, the geographical layout of the town is arranged according to this initial arrangement. Roughly, Rio is composed of three main family clans, each headed by the elderly founders of the town. Most village life is played out along these kin lineages, with relatives building their houses close to other relatives, sharing the adobe-ovens, and allowing access to the fields of each other when in need of recollecting wood to kindle their kitchen fires. Besides kin relations, alliances across generations also shape the social dynamics of the town. This double tier has created two systems of authority that, although interdependent and inseparable, are played out interchangeably depending on the issue that is in question. On the one hand there are clan lineages, organised according to seniority and personal merits. On the other hand there are generation alliances, dividing the men of the town into two categorical groups: *Ejidatarios Capacitados* and *Ejidatarios Congregados*. While the vote of a *capacitado* counts as a "full vote" in community decisions, the vote of a *congregado* counts as only half. Since all elder members have the most experience, they make up the group of the *capacitados*. The men of the younger generation, most of them between 20 and 35 years old, form the group of the *congregados*.

Experience and skill, however, are not the only criteria used to allocate people to either group. Any "outsider" who is accepted as a new member into the community, despite his or her age, must begin as a *congregado*. Only after a person earns enough merits --i.e. showing that he is a "decent and proper person to the community"-- can he become an *ejidatario capacitado*. In this way, 'new-comers' are welcomed into the community but only granted limited power in the decision-making of village affairs. As one *campesino* put it: "We must first get to know a person

and see that his family are trustworthy people before they become *capasitados*". The phrase "trustworthy people" (*gente de confianza*) refers not only to personal trust towards a person but it also implies that the person who is being trusted is socially situated, accountable within the hierarchy of the town. As we will see, notions of trust and empathy rest on principles of group cohesion and integrity, and one way in which a person becomes "trustworthy" is by forming social bonds with members of the community, either by marring into the community or establishing a *compadrasgo* with another member (see below).

Since feelings of integrity and cohesion are intrinsic to health and well being in Rio Negro, villagers have created a set of social relations that, as a whole, weaves all members into an integral web of fathers, sisters, cousins, and *compadres*. In fact, the household of doña Chona is the only family which is currently not related to the town's kinship. She is a divorced woman who belongs to an Evangelical sect (*Adventist*) that, although tolerated, is not well accepted by the people of the town. It is the house farthest away from the village cluster, perched some five minutes away atop the edge of the eastern gully. The other thirty-eight families living in Rio are integrated into a web of kin relations; all adult members are either related through blood ties or *compadrasgos*. The term refers to a relationship that is formed between the parents and the god-fathers when the two couples unite to baptise a child: while the men take the title of *compadres* the women become *comadres*. Although it is accepted to become a *compadre* to one's brother or cousin, locals prefer that the bond be made with members of the village who are outside the family lineage. There is not one adult man or woman in the village who is not related to someone else by *compadrasgos*. Even the people who do not have children (the criteria for a *compadrasgo*) are engaged in these kinds of relations. Besides creating an intricate web of family ties, *compadrasgos* are also strategically used to integrate newcomers into the town's kinship. Don Ramón, a Guatemalan *campesino* who migrated into the region seven years ago, was integrated into the village kingship by becoming the compadre of don Miguel, an influential

individual who is simultaneously the town's priest and the president of a local coffee coop (see below).

"People from the Outside"

Today, communities like Rio Negro are established as separate hamlets from the *fincas*, organised according to their own principles and "ways of doing things". However, their independence is only partial as some villagers continue to relay on seasonal employment in the *fincas* when their savings run out. What makes their independence partial is their lack of access to transportation, especially when trucking their coffee out of the communities and into the market. Thus, while communities operate as self-contained units to regulate internal matters they are also interrelated to a larger whole that, historically, has not always worked in their favour. This play between "inner" and "outer" worlds contributes to some of the basic forms and tensions marking Rio's society, a kind of "fluid boundary" that underscores local notions of trust, reciprocity, and wholesomeness. These values and their social demarcations are most vividly manifested in the way local villagers relate among themselves and in how they interact with illegal Guatemalan workers and the middlemen who visit the town to buy coffee.

At first glance, the town's only means of communication with the outside seems to be a rough dirt road that travels across the valley before it zig-zags through the coffee mountain fields. Rio Negro is the head of this snake-like road, looking onto one of Mexico's last remaining tropical jungles. Some twelve years ago, the road was only a mule path, connecting Rio Negro to one of the *fincas* down bellow in the valley. Today, it is used to transport coffee and as a commercial avenue for "travelling vendors" who sporadically visit the town to sell fresh vegetables, fruits, and (although prohibited by the community itself) alcohol. But as one learns with time, hamlets like Rio Negro also have many "back doors" that connect the village to an intricate web of multiple mountain paths. Beyond the coffee fields that surround villages lies a series of mule-paths that

locals use to visit relatives in distant communities, relay messages, exchange corn sacks, or trudge down to seek help during the rainy season when the main road closes down due to untraveling mud conditions.

These mule paths connect Rio Negro to an incredibly large network of small communities and ranches, extending all the way into Guatemalan territory. While I was in Rio, a group of three Guatemalan travelling vendors visited the town for two consecutive days. As a group, they paid individual visits to each of the twenty-seven buildings to offer their merchandise to the people (clothes, kitchen utensils, plastic shoes, and other practical supplies). With a heavy sack on their backs and a pair of home made *guaraches* (leather sandals), they trek the Sierra in search for clients, roaming the vicinity in the *ejidos*[2] of Toluca, Puerto Rico, Laguna, and Nueva Colombia. The narrow mountain paths are also used by Guatemalans who cross the sierra in search of seasonal work. Generally they end up working in the large *fincas* of the valley, but some of them are hired by the *campesinos* of villages like Rio Negro when the harvest is at its peak and extra labour is needed. The agreement between local *campesinos* and Guatemalan workers is generally the same as in the fincas: a place to rest, food, and a low salary of four dollars per day.

On an early morning, I accompanied don Genaro up to his *milpa* (corn field) to fetch the last corn cobs of the season. On the way back, we walked down a narrow mountain path, zig-zagging into a winding tunnel through people's coffee fields. We passed a group of five persons who were harvesting the plants for the first time in the year; there were three family members and two Guatemalan workers. As we wound down the dusty path and made our way into the town, don Genaro exchanged a salute with each local, usually a nod of the head while mumbling the person's name. But when we reached the Guatemalan workers, nothing was acknowledged; don Genaro simply kept walking while the two workers continued harvesting the coffee plants. Some days later, I recounted the incident to Tancho and asked him about its significance. As if diverting me to another topic of conversation, he concluded that they "are not accustomed to greet them. No person here does

that". I began to notice how day labourers, especially if they are migrant "*chapines*"[3] from Guatemala, are often treated with distrust and reservation.

In general, locals distrust foreigners or, as they put it, "*personas de las afueras*". The phrase refers to "persons from the outside", as in belonging yet independent and self-contained. Local conceptions of space --from body to house to cosmos-- are always carried out along spatial boundaries that mark moments of inclusion or exclusion, or "in" and "out". In this case, "*personas de las afueras*" refers to a regional "out", to communities with which people of Rio Negro do not have much interaction or familiar knowledge. Judging by the comments of people and the type of alliances that are formed through trans-community marriages, the projection of this mental map onto the hilly terrain of the region would include three neighbouring communities bounded by an "inner" region. Beyond lies an (unbounded-)outer world. According to this spatial division of value, people from Guatemala are "the least known" because, as one local explained, "none of their family members or friends is related to someone in the vicinity." Feelings of distrust and reservation, as I read them, are grounded in villagers' inability to situate a person within a familiar kin lineage, an inability to make social references or a 'family map' of the person's identity. "If the person's family is known to us", said don Elias one day, "then we know that he is not going to come into the town and do something to offend us. If he did, he would put the whole family name into shame."

Values that mark "inside" and "outside" boundaries are also apparent in how cultural notions of "collectiveness" manifest themselves in community life. Rio's sense of collectiveness is marked by values of autonomy and interdependence, shaping how people construct their houses into a family, lay their buildings into clans, and integrate the clans into a single village cluster. Houses in Rio mostly consist of adobe bricks, a compacted earthen floor, and a structure of wooden beams supporting a tin roof. All houses are constructed by hand and, with the exception of the tin roof, made from materials found in the immediate environment. To give structure and form to adobe bricks, people use pine needles mixed in wet soil. After the mixture has been mashed with the feet

into clay, the paste is poured into a rectangular wooden mould, letting it dry in the shade for three days. (see figure 4) The wood for the house's beams, doors, and frames, is "taken out" (*sacar*) from a family owned "*aserradero*", a primitive sawmill in the forest where locals "fell" a tree, construct a rudimentary structure to roll and hold the log into place, and saw by hand the desired beams. It is considered proper not to talk much about the location of the *aserradero* since wood, a symbol of wealth, is regarded as a matter better kept within the family. "We don't say where it is", Tancho said jokingly, "otherwise people will want it."

Most houses basically consist of a single adobe that is divided into two rooms: a sleeping chamber and a space to store their tools, food, and the coffee harvest. The kitchen is often, but not always, a separate building. All family members sleep in a single room, with the children and adults sharing the available beds; but each with his or her own blanket. Sleeping chambers are considered private and are used only at night when people retire for the day, the rest of the time people gather outside in their patios or in the kitchen when it is time to eat a meal or to take refuge from the rain.

In Rio, people believe that it is wise to control the expression of personal desires that go against the social grain, keeping certain thoughts and feelings private while avoiding any kind of behaviour that is proud and arrogant. In a similar way, rooms are used to store objects that symbolise wealth and status: planks of wood, animal skins, and, occasionally, a television. Notice, for instance, the wooden planks that rest on the beams of don Francisco's house. (see figure 5) Displaying them in public is considered bad taste because the person "would be showing her pride, how much better she is from the rest of her people." Pride, in Rio, is especially disapproved because it brings feelings of rancour and envy that occasion counterproductive social tensions, working to separate and fissure groups apart. When I asked Félix to talk about pride he replied: "We don't like it because it brings distinctions among us." To avoid this, villagers try to behave in ways that prevent feelings of rancour, fission, and fragmentation by controlling the form and style of antagonistic behaviour.

Values of autonomy and interdependence are also apparent in how particular families group themselves into clans. This is apparent not only in how blood ties and *compadrasgos* interrelate

families into a group, but also in how people of Rio Negro physically layout their buildings into a configuration that reflects clan associations. As I mentioned above, Rio Negro consists of three, roughly defined, family clans, each headed by one of the founders of the town. Since its beginning, the village has expanded from the initial three buildings that perched on the hill to the twenty seven houses that now constitute the town. Although autonomous in their own way, most houses are laid out according to a clan arrangement in three clusters: an eastern, central, and western clan.

The interelatedness that unites families into clan entails values that often, but not always, contribute to social harmony. Individuals are autonomous, yet accountable and defined by the social context in which they are embedded. In this sense, a person derives part of her identity from the clan and family she belongs to, but membership in a clan or family has its responsibilities and obligations. Indeed, Rio's concept of personhood is partly founded on this tension. In a clan, an ideal person coexists in ways that sustain social harmony and prevent fission, contributing to the prosperity of all while maintaining his or her own sense of identity. For instance, not all villagers have access to a patio to dry their coffee grains, nor do all members own their own *pulpero*, a manual grinder that crushes coffee berries and separates the pulp from the seeds. (see figure 3) To overcome this shortage, villagers often rely on clan members for access to their patio and equipment. Since individual behaviour is constrained by local concepts of personhood (of what it entails to be a "good" or "bad" clan member), the favours are often returned so as to show a similar disposition that contributes to the health of all. When Tancho married the daughter of don Genaro, for instance, the latter gave him access to his *aserradero*, lent him his hand saw, and helped Tancho build his house. Since then, Tancho has made himself accessible when his help has been needed, assisting don Genaro with the sowing of his mountain maize, lugging heavy loads of coffee to town, and providing assistance with house-chores.

On occasions, however, a member may retract his or her help and deny access to his patio or *pulpero*. If his actions are not legitimate and cannot be accounted for, he or she is said to "have greed" or be troubled by something that makes the person disjunctive in community life. When this

happens, when the person does not live up to his social role as a proper member over a long period of time, he is usually disapproved of by the community since his actions (i.e. not granting access to a patio) not only put one member into an awkward situation, but reverberates in the village as a whole. When a member is suddenly deprived from access to a patio, for example, family clans must accommodate to the unexpected changes so that the needs of a stranded member can be fulfilled and his coffee is not wasted away. In these cases, the person responsible for the disruption is shown disapproval until, ideally, he or she performs in congruity to what his or her role entails.

Showing disapproval, however, does not mean that villagers simply force a person to behave in ways that they see fit, but rather, it involves placing the subject within a 'space of questioning' where he or she can reflect on his behaviour. In Rio's society, long periods of "disjunctive behaviour" in a woman attract the attention of clan members. They investigate the roots of the person's trouble and see the ways in which the situation can be corrected. Generally, this involves showing tacit signs of disapproval. However, the element of disapproval does not work as a "punishment" in the literal sense of the word since the goal of the intervention is not to shame the individual but to facilitate reparation. The effectiveness of the reparation works through empathy, a process by which the person is enticed to reflect on his or her own 'uncooperativeness' and the disruption that this has occasioned on the rest of the village. The point here is to accent that it is the desire, and not the obligation of the person, that marks the efficacy of change. Only if the person continues to behave in ways that continue disrupting clan dynamics does a more diligent punishment apply, often involving the infliction of guilt and, in severe cases, a tacit process by which the person is isolated from clan life.

Rio's collectiveness, and the values of autonomy and interdependence that define it, is also reflected in the way family clans tie together into a single village cluster. Through the everyday use of the body --sharing an adobe, harvesting coffee-- villagers tacitly sense and reflect the values that go into the compositions of corporate groupings. That the houses of the town are tightly packed into a cohesive cluster is no coincidence. The values that go into the composition of corporate groupings

is clearly seen in way in which the village chooses to present itself as a single unified whole to the outside. During Holy Week the communities of the region are accustomed to invite each other to participate in mass. On one occasion, I accompanied the people of Rio Negro to Puerto Rico, a sister hamlet that lies an hour away, flanking the valley. Fourteen adult members and eleven children made the pilgrimage to Puerto Rico, all dressed in their best clothes and shoes and with the women carrying a collection of wild flowers to give as a present.

We walked along the main road through the valley in separate small groups. When we reached the detour into Puerto Rico, ten minutes before arriving to the town, we sat in the shadow of a large tree and waited there for the rest of the group to arrive. Only when we were summoned into a single group did we begin to make our way through the coffee fields and into the town's church. When I asked Tancho why we had not gone into the town and waited for the rest of the people while we drank a soda at the local store, he replied that "it was better to come in as a group. If we all had come in separate groups, the people here would not know who the people of Rio Negro are." People's preference to present themselves as a unified whole was made clear on another occasion. While trekking on a winding path on our way back to Rio Negro we came across a small mountain ranch in the middle of the forest. On the outskirts of the ranch, demarcated by a man-made ditch, don Miguel stopped and began a trivial conversation until Doroteo, who was lagging behind, had caught up to us. Again, we made our way through the ranch's property as a unified group so that the people in the ranch would know "who and how many of us are".

Coyotes: Friend and Foe

During the harvesting season of coffee (February to April), when the communities of the region have grains to sell, a series of "*coyotes*" (middle-men) truck the dirt mountain roads of the Reserve searching to buy coffee and collect the payments for old debts. Most of the *coyotes* of the region live in Jaltenango, an old hacienda turned into a town which is now the head of the

municipality for most of the communities that sit on the eastern flank of the Sierra. The pebble-street town is not big, but counts with electricity, running water, a sewer system, and access to one paved road that connects the region to Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas.

Although all *coyotes* "working the reserve" occasionally visit the communities at random in search for new clients, a tacit moral code is at work among themselves, marking the territorial boundaries to which each man is "entitled". At the same time, each community shares a tacit 'contract' with a particular *coyote*: ideally, while villagers sell their coffee only to him, the *coyote* "corresponds" with gestures and favours that show empathy, respect, and a general disposition to help in times of need. This is not to say that the *coyote* does not take advantage of villagers' lack of access to transportation and that he only acts as a friend to local villagers: after all, *coyotes* do honour their nick-name[4] and exploit the marginal conditions of local communities. I say this so as not to reduce the relationship between villagers and the *coyote* to only political rhetoric and matters divested from pleasure, friendship, and trust. I find it necessary to attend to how local *campesinos* and the *coyote* try to behave in ways that ease antagonistic tensions because, in my estimation, it is precisely the play on this ambiguity (i.e. between feelings of trust and suspicion) that marks the tension of the relationship. By attending to feelings of trust and suspicion in practice we can also see how villagers confront, make sense of, and actively construe a dialogue with the *coyotes*. In this sense, local people are not simply passive victims of an oppressive system but active participants that, although they are at a disadvantage, make use of moral and ethical codes to negotiate the terms of their trade with the *coyote*.

This last point is important because, unlike most literature on "third world people", I wish to show the resilience and determination with which people of Rio Negro live their lives --even when this involves negotiating at a disadvantage with government officials or the *coyotes* themselves. So called rural "third world people" have long been oppressed by the socio-political structures and cultural stigma that were left behind by colonialism, but it would be a mistake to simply portray them as passive victims of an exploitative system without attending to how they, in

their own terms, shape their world in ways that is more conducive to a healthy and pleasant lifestyle. Here, I am not talking about the "human resources" or the "political strategies" of which Attwood[5] or Ostrom[6] speak, or the "grass roots" initiatives that locals use to organise themselves into political groups and so establish a fishing co-operative. Rather, here I wish to focus on the more mundane aspects of everyday life and talk about how local villagers, although living in poverty, maintain a salubrious sense of vitality. I do this not to romanticise poverty and the harsh conditions that rural life often entails, as we saw with don Hilario. I focus on how people maintain (and carefully cultivate) a sense of vitality so as not to mistake the material conditions of poverty with the animic quality intrinsic to misfortune. More than once have I heard a tourist say that people in Mexico "are so poor but look so happy and vital". Indeed, we do not often hear about the vital condition of people when reading development reports on poverty. But failing to report on it only impoverishes our understanding of how "third world people" shape their world in ways that bring a sense of dignity and pleasure to their lives.

During the harvesting season, when coffee is being trucked out of the Sierra into Jaltenango, a number of business men take up temporary residence in Jaltenango and act as "intermediaries" between the *coyotes* and large international coffee warehouses. These intermediaries work through the International Stock Market via cellular phones (there is only one phone in Jaltenango) and buy the coffee from the *coyotes* at approximately 30 percent more than the price the *coyotes* paid to villagers (at approximately $120 Canadian dollars per 70 kilos). By the time the coffee arrives to our table in North America, after it has passed through the stock market and another warehouse in a foreign country for distribution, its price has been marked up by five hundred percent. Somewhere in between the hands of don Francisco and our cup of coffee in North America lies a substantial capital gain, with the people and the jungle of Rio Negro bearing the burdens of a high-tech international market economy.

One of the goals that the reserve has "to raise standards of living" is to bypass the *coyote* and link Rio Negro to an international warehouse. During my visit, the agronomers of the reserve

were providing legal and technical support to three communities, helping the local people consolidate into a co-operative called *Campesinos Ecológicos de la Sierra Madre de Chiapas* (CESMACH). It is composed of 120 *campesinos* from three communities (Rio Negro being one of them) whose goal is to sell organically grown coffee abroad. From a financial point of view, the advantage of cultivating coffee organically is two-fold: while its price is roughly 30 percent higher than conventional coffee, it is also not controlled by the International Stock Market; and thus, it is not susceptible to artificial price controls and market mechanisms. The paradox is that local *campesinos*, unable to afford chemical pesticides and fertilisers, have been growing organic coffee for some time now. However, they have not been able to sell it as such because they lack the legal certification to show that their coffee lives up to the criteria for organically grown grains. The problem is one of 'recognition'. Local *campesinos* hope that once they are consolidated into CESMACH, they will be able to act as a political group and ask the government for a "quality stamp" that guarantees their coffee as an organically grown product.

Don Silvio

The local *coyote* that visits the area of Rio Negro is don Silvio, a fifty year old *mestizo* of pale skin and green eyes who drives a yellow two-tone truck. (see figure 5) He has been a friend of don Francisco for over thirty years and until recently, before the reserve began to help local communities into organising their own trucking of coffee into Jaltenango, held the monopoly of most of the coffee grown in Rio Negro and neighbouring villages. The relationship between local villagers and don Silvio carries the ambiguity of trust and suspicion described above.

Taking into consideration how much the *coyote* earns for acting as a middleman, people in Rio Negro expect to be paid according to the going-price of coffee for that day. The problem is that such news does not travel to Rio Negro on a regular basis, and not everyone who visits the town knows the price of coffee at the time. Thus, villagers often rely on their own estimates when

selling their sacks to don Silvio. This asymmetry in access to price information is not as advantageous to the *coyotes* as it may seem at first. In Rio, there is a strong ethical code at work when *coyotes* and villagers set a price for their coffee, a dialogue that is mediated through a moral understanding about people's sense of integrity and "word of honour". If villagers "discover that don Silvio took advantage" of them on a certain day, if his prices were "too low" for that day, the *coyote* will lose credibility in the eyes of people and his reputation will come to haunt him the next time he visits the town to buy coffee. According to social ideals, it is considered proper that don Silvio pay a price that reflects the market value for that day. If don Silvio does not live up to the integrity that his social role entails, local *campesinos* can sell their sacks to one of the other *coyotes* without bearing the responsibility of breaching the social etiquette that underlies notions of trust and honesty.

Thus, to avoid losing people's trust and reflect values of honesty and integrity, the *coyote* tries (to an extent) to buy coffee at prices that will put him above the rest of the pack. This is one way of showing the community his respect and disposition to help while advancing a sense of personhood that is congruent with local notions of friendship and trust.

I have tried to show, however briefly, how the relationship between locals and don Silvio is rooted in, and bounded by, a larger sphere of grace and value: the cultural aesthetics of Rio. The moral constraints underlying honesty and integrity mediate how don Silvio and local villagers negotiate on a price, assess each other's behaviour, and responded to the meanings of their gestures. For instance, we learned that a person's health and well being rests on principles of cohesion and integrity. The extent to which the actions of don Silvio contribute to (or hinders) these sensibilities is often used as the criteria on which perceptions of personhood are based. If don Silvio takes advantage, then villagers feel cheated, and have a sense of distrust and a lack of empathy for the *coyote*. If he pays "fair prices" and shows disposition to help, villagers value his contribution to their well being. Meaning, here, is not about monetary prices alone but on how propositions about prices are advanced and how these propositions correspond to notions of trust,

friendship, or suspicion. How people value their relationship with don Silvio is a question that is assessed viscerally, on how the relationship, which includes financial ideals, contributes (or hinders) to people's sense of comfort, pleasure, or distrust. These sensibilities, as I have tried to show, tie into an aesthetic of the everyday; on the culturally derived schemas that go into the composition of people's sense of health or illness.

Chapter Four

Corn and Milpas: Embodied Health and Divine Value

This chapter is designed to answer the last question posed in the introduction to this work. I will look at how a *campesino's* experience of his or her land works in specific ways to shape the conceptions of themselves, and vice versa. But since our concern is not only with how *campesinos* think about land, but also with how they come to know, feel, and understand the experience, we look at the play between concept and feeling, and so evaluate the force and significance that this has on local people. To an extent, we have already begun to do this, exploring how villagers' spatial boundaries give meaning and form to feelings of trust and suspicion (i.e. "people from the outside"). Here, I specifically wish to explore how the local *milpas* (corn-fields) tie into experiences of fear, salubrity, and comfort. In Rio, when a person falls ill, when harvest yields suddenly drop, or when unknown forces disrupt family relations, most villagers consider it commonsensical to partly treat the physical manifestations of illness by attending to its spiritual causes. We saw, for instance, how locals strolled the town at night whenever they lacked *animos*, looking to gather with friends and relatives. Similarly, villagers use dry cobs of corn to invigorate themselves with divine force when away in the mountains. Apparently, corn soothes people's fears and anxieties, effecting a change of bodily sensation that brings comfort and serenity.

Most people of Rio Negro are *campesinos* of Mayan descent who, despite the advancements by the Catholic and Evangelical churches, continue to worship Christian saints as well as some traditional Mayan deities. People of Rio live in a universe that is populated by eternal gods, mortal humans, and hunting spirits. While some spirits and gods are considered allies to humans and can thus be beseeched in times of need, evil spirits and ghosts are avoided because they

can inflict grief and suffering when people cross their "paths". Robert Desjarlais[1] has found something similar in the land of Yolmo people, in Nepal. The way I understand it, Yolmo people, who come from a line of Buddhist descent, use a spatial metaphor to divide their world into three stratified realms: the "celestial land of gods", "the telluric land of humans", and a "subterranean hell". This view, as I read it, denotes a world where humans are sandwiched between a layer of gods and a hell of demons, a horizontal stratification of space where value deteriorates as we hover closer to the ground.

The spatial criteria that people use in Rio Negro to distinguish the habitat of these entities is guided by different principles. The aesthetic system that governs Rio's cosmology does not lock gods, humans, and ghosts, into such spatial grids of value. Instead, people of Rio Negro live in a universe that is much more fluid and assorted, where one can expect to find terrestrial gods as well as astral ghosts. For instance, the god of corn, one of the most important deities for Mayan people, inhabits just beneath the surface of the earth. I find this difference to be an important one, mainly because it lays out a commonsensical logic where land, mountains, and valleys house beneficial gods and not just host "subterranean demons". For villagers of Rio, the universe holds three distinct realms (gods, humans, and evil spirits), but these realms do not correspond to the horizontal arrangement of space that Desjarlais finds. That people in Rio Negro find value in "earthen deities" becomes highly significant for Mexican *campesinos* who, almost by definition, construe a great part of their identity form their relationship to the land, adobe, and corn. In Rio, while hellish demons are known to roam the air by night, so do certain gods inhabit the soil to "bestow it with force and energy".

In the land of humans exists a gamut of forces and beings. Depending on the nature of the entity and the spiritual fortitude of the person, they can inflict suffering on people or be of aid in times of trouble. Saints and gods, for instance, are allies to humans and can be beseeched when a person finds him or herself in *apuros*. *Apuros* can refer to a stressful social

situation in which a villager, usually an adult, cannot live up to the expectations of his or her social role. Don Hilario, for instance, called onto San Antonio when he realised that the year's harvest was not going to be enough to honour his old debts. However, a person can also find him or herself in *apuros* in the presence of a ghost or hungry spirit, especially if away from the person's protective social context. Being frightened is considered dangerous because the experience jolts the body out of composition and throws it out of balance, allowing the formation of bodily fissures and the possibility of loosing one's soul. When this happens, when people are spooked, people beseech the saints (and each person has his or her own favourite one for each occasion) and call for their protection and aid. In response to these ghostly threats, villagers try to live in ways that bring health: they avoid crossing rivers at night where haunting spirits are known to hide, they recite birthday chants before dawn to protect infants "from the demon's claws", and behave according to social ideals that bring a sense of completion, purity, and wholesomeness.

The relationship that Mexican *campesinos* have had with saints and gods has been a particular one.[2] People of Rio believe that saints have the responsibility to help humans since saints, having walked the earth at one time before they became eternal, are acquainted with villagers' experiences and troubles. While saints are much more immediate and intervene in human affairs constantly, gods, who inhabit the same cosmos, act more like neighbours: always present but each with his or her own sense of purpose in life --somewhat remote and Olympian. Gods must generally be honoured during particular times of the year, especially after the harvesting season is over, when villagers need to revitalise the earth and "restore its lost energy and force". To do this, people hold a small fiesta on their fields where they delight the gods with firecrackers, music, food, and drink. The most important deities are the "god of corn", the "spirit of the earth", and Christ; and all of them are symbolised through a clay figure of Christ during the ceremonies.

Corn and the Aesthetics of Health

In Rio Negro, corn is not simply a symbol of god or the representation of an ancient Mayan myth, but rather, it is a visceral incarnation of divine force that is vital, engaging, and affective. Sleeping by a pile of corn while away in the mountains, as we will see, soothes fear and anxiety, making people feel more secure and "at peace". When corn cobs are ripe and can be eaten by wild animals, people in Rio protect their harvest by sending one family member, usually a teenage son, to sleep in the *milpa*. His duty is to vigilante the harvest for about three weeks, keeping wild predators away, and guard against potential raids by members of neighbouring communities. During the first two weeks of vigilance, when the cobs are still green and can only be eaten by large animals, locals only need to guard their fields during the night, when nocturnal predators (foxes, racoons, and wild boars) roam the proximities in search for food. Later, however, when the cobs ripen and small rodents begin to get at their harvest, villagers take the precaution of vigilating their *milpas* during the day as well. To accomplish this more efficiently, they usually bring to the mountains a pack of domesticated dogs, and build, as a lookout point, a rudimentary hut on the highest point of the field. From their hut, they sit atop their maize in a dry shade that overlooks most of the harvest, encouraging their dogs to patrol the fields at random as they sniff for wild mice. (see figure 6) Despite locals' diligence and the precautions they take to avoid losses, a great number of cobs are lost each season. In a good year, families can expect to lose about a third of their corn to wild animals. "On occasions", don Genaro lamented, "we've lost it all."

Since the town is completely surrounded by coffee fields, the *milpas* are located far away from the village, usually deeper into the reserve in one of the nearby mountains that lie north of Rio Negro. The *milpas* are generally small fields in the forest that have been cleared, tilted, and prepared for agriculture. The possession of the land is based on who clears the forests and on how often he, and on rare occasions she, "works the fields". The average size is two acres and, generally, the fields are rotated throughout the year with corn, beans, and squash, the three main staples of Rio Negro along with rice.

"MEN OF CORN"

"Men of Corn"

When it is time to go to the monte (wilderness) and sleep alone in the milpas, it is necessary to take some precautions to prevent the assault of an evil spirit or a hungry ghost. Literally, the term monte means mountains. However, it is a ladened term that Mexican campesinos use often to refer to a location in space that has a particular cosmological value. Specifically, it refers to a place that is wild, disordered, unknown, and dangerous. El monte, in this sense, "spatially anchors"[3] people "outside" the protective boundaries of society where a person, divested from the social context that hearths and protects local villagers, must act on his or her own terms. Since in

"*el monte* roams the tiger [jaguar] and the evil spirits" people are advised not to venture in it, especially at dusk when hungry ghosts and wild animals are known to come out of hiding.

Being far away from the town, according to local belief, means that a person is temporarily disembodied from his or her circle of family and friends, fragmented from a protective social context that generates health and fortitude. To make up for this physical isolation and protect their "soul" (*alma*) from being "enchanted"[4] by a ghost, locals try to maintain their body well compacted and composed. In doing so, a person may better contain his or her spirit inside the body and prevent, in case that an assault occurs, dangerous bodily fissures from opening up. Integrity, in Rio, is greatly valued (if not necessary) because it gives people a sense of cohesion and "force" that, if effective, makes it harder for a ghost to get at the inside of a person and enchant his or her spirit. To behave in ways that generate feelings of integrity, dignity, and honesty, villagers try to avoid situations that generate rancour and ill humour.

To avoid "enchantments" while away in the *milpas*, local *campesinos* take the precaution of sleeping by a small pile of dry corn cobs at night. To people of Rio Negro, and to most Mexican *campesinos*, corn is a conjurance of associations, embodiment of forces, and a spectrum of meaning whose roots go back to pre-colonial times (see below). Today, corn is considered to be the "essence to the bones of Christ" (and of humans too), replete with a divine force that is vital, immediate, and affective. "If kept near a person", Tancho explained while we were still on the *milpa* of don Genaro, "corn provides protection and bestows people with vigour and force".

Mesoamerican societies have linked corn to sources of divine force for time immemorial, and for each culture (Toltecs, Olmecs, Aztecs, and Mayas) there is a representative god and a ritual to follow. Today, many ancient beliefs have been re-appropriated and moulded to suit cultural changes. For instance, in Tepoztlán, a town of Aztec descent in central Mexico, friends and family gather each year in their *milpa* to celebrate the *fiesta* of *la Pericoñada*. *La Pericoñada* is an annual ritual that is performed to show gratitude for the harvest and to restore the soil for its lost energy

and force. The *fiesta* is named after the flower *pericòn*, a bright orange flower with an intense scent that penetrates the mountain air, intensifying the experience of the ritual.[5] When the flower starts blooming, sometime in late November, adults and children trek to the surrounding fields to hold the *fiesta*. On the *milpas*, they spend the day while they eat roasted corn, cut wild *pericòn*, and weave the long stems into a Christian cross of orange flowers. At the end of the day, when it is time to come back, some crosses are left on the *milpa* for protection while others are brought back to town and hanged on the doors of people's houses. The crosses, dried over time, hang until they are replaced the next year.

As these practices show, corn embodies a divine force that protects, feeds, and links humans to an ecology of physical fortitude and spiritual health. In Rio Negro, something similar happens. An ancient Mayan myth, much of which has lost its meaning today, tells of a time when the universe (*Osil Balamil*) originated out of a deep darkness, a time when "words lacked significance and things existed without their name."[6] At the beginning, the "guardians of the sky" created the first humans out of clay and wood. But these were susceptible to rain and fire, perishing not long before they were put on earth. Discontent with their previous work, the guardians decided to create a man of gold. Unlike his predecessors, this man was able to survive; however, he did not become the "true one" (*Tojol Ab'al*) because his heart was "too hard" and "did not thank the gods" properly. It was not until the flesh of humans was made of corn that they, humans, resisted the conditions on earth, "acquiring their true essence as cultivators and community oriented people."[7] Since then, "the men of corn" speak the "genuine and correct word", living from their harvest without aspiring to accumulation, greed, and envy.

The above comes from the *Popol vuh*, a sacred script about the creation of the universe that outlines the cosmology of ancient Mayan people. Although many of the myths stipulated in the script have been withered by time and lost in practice, some versions and adaptations of them continue to be a part of the everyday life of some Mayan societies. Barbara Tedlock, for instance,

found that the people of the Guatemalan highlands are "interested not only in the quantities of time but also in its qualities, especially its meaning for human affairs."[8] She illustrates how local notions of time revolve around a "260-day calendar" (in which each day has a particular name, quality, and purpose), and how these qualitative conceptions of time work as the main organising principles for much of social, religious, and agricultural life. Relevant to this work, she finds that "mountain maize, like humans, is sown or conceived on a particular day name and number"[9], and that the time of gestation for both humans and corn is of nine months (or, a complete cycle of the calendar). This means that, ideally, corn should come to fruitition on the same day of the calendar that it was sown, only one cycle later. Tedlock concludes that "the nine-month growing period of mountain maize, like the human gestation period, may help account for the 260-day length of the sacred almanac."[10]

The culture of Rio Negro, an amalgamation of immigrants that have come mostly from the highlands and coast of Chiapas, does not preserve Mayan traditions with the rigor that Tedlock finds in Guatemala. Rio's colonial past as peons in the fincas and, recently, the external pressure they face by a modern world consumed by the images of television, have considerably reworked the ethnic identity of the town (especially of the younger generation). Despite this distance, the departure has only been partial and selective, as Mayan Indians have slowly become Mayan *campesinos*. I found that much of the content of ancient myths has been re-appropriated and recycled into new cultural forms that, in general, reflect the changes occasioned by the historical transition that has accompanied the profile of the *campesinato*. For instance, many of the social ideals and moral constraints found in the Popol Vuh (i.e. "to live without aspiring to greed, accumulation, and envy") continue to set the moral and ethical tempo of much of Rio's life, underscoring cultural notions of honesty, integrity, and dignity. In my estimation, this process of re-appropriation and recycling of cultural forms has created a set of new meanings that tend to focus more on the immediacies of the everyday than on the origin and evolution of humans in the

cosmos. Don Genaro, the local healer, could not tell me much about the darkness from whence the cosmos came and how qualitative distinctions of time bare any influence on them; nor could he talk about the gods using their original Mayan names. But when it came to interpreting somatic forms of distress, assess the "divine force of corn", and talking about how to maintain social and personal harmony, his knowledge was extensive, tapping into a tacit world where humans, spirits, saints, and gods, merged into a dynamic whole.

One of the most pervasive myths of Rio that underscores cultural notions of health and well being is related to the "men of corn". As I mention above, corn embodies an aesthetics of divine force that bestows people with a sense of cohesion, integrity, and spiritual fortitude. The logic of efficacy here speaks of an interplay between cultural "idioms" of unity (i.e. compactness, cohesion) and the emotional responses that they occasion (i.e. the soothing of fear). These idioms (and the somatic sensibilities they evoke), I argue, stem from the spiritual ramifications attributed to corn. For people of Rio, especially when they are away in the mountains sleeping in their *milpas*, *maize* is integral to ways of constructing the interrelationship between body, spirit, and whole --the basic components to an experiential gestalt of health and well being. Since *maize* embodies the divine force of Christ, and humans, in turn, "are made of its dough", corn serves as a metaphorical intersection where the divine and the profane attend to each other's presence --a space "betwixt and between" realms of experience. Seen from this light, corn contributes to an ecology of health by breaching the borders between tacit and apparent realms of experience, creating a circuit of knowledge and a conduit for the flow of divine force that, in times of apprehension, bestows people with fortitude and salubrity.

Corn's embodiment of divine force and the feelings of fortitude that it occasions in humans, are often sought by villagers during moments of fear and perturbation. Since *campesinos* are most susceptible to suffer from emotional distress when divested from their protective social

context, villagers appeal to corn where idioms of spiritual support can be found. In *el monte*, the divine force embodied in *maize* (and the embodiment of *maize* in human flesh), work on a person's physiology in specific ways to create a bodily experience of containment, cohesion, and integrity. These forms of sensory experience prompt the body into an ecology of health and salubrity that, if and when effective, helps soothe a person's fear and distress.

By attending to how experience is construed *in practice*, I have sketched how human sentience is tied to cultural values of unity, and how these values, when tied to the larger cosmology of corn, contribute to feelings of health and well being. I refer to this interrelation as the "embodied aesthetic of corn" and argue that, in moments of separation and exposure, villagers make use of it to generate an ecology of health that ties the body, spirit, and village, into a dynamic whole. But to understand the full implications of the dialogue that locals hold with the "force of corn" (how it works to mitigate fear and generate feelings of serenity) we had to go beyond symbolic meanings and attend to the visceral, immediate, tensions that these experiences occasion. Experiences of fear, distress, and relief are, after all, somatic tensions realised at the plane of the body. With such an approach I have tried to convey the force and significance of these experiences, attending to how local *campesinos* experience comfort and pleasure when near a pile of corn.

This does not mean that our concern is with the emotional or with a so called "underdistanced" look at culture, as Sheff would phrase the problem[11]; but rather, I argue that the significance of things --be this an idea, an object, or an emotion-- "arises from a visceral engagement with symbolic form."[12] I agree that we must take "distance" when interpreting distant cultures to achieve reflective and sound interpretations, but the distance must be achieved within a context that reflects the sentient condition under which the distance was taken, not divested from it. I have tried to render Sheff's "esthetic distance"[13], a place where "there is a balance between feeling and thought", but I have done this within a plane of sensory experience so as to ground the action of "taking distance" within the sensory condition that bounds it. As mentioned earlier, the

emotional and the sensory are often used in a misleading way, as if they were interchangeable. Sheff maintains, "at esthetic distance, there is a balance of thought and feeling."[14] Indeed, but the realisation of this balance occurs while we are alive and sensuous, and thus we must convey the full force of this experience as a sensory condition. We can understand something of the culture of Mexican *campesinos* not only through analytical insights, but we can also "make sense, through non-verbal, visceral means, something of a people's sensibilities by attending to the patterns, orientations, and concerns that commonly impact on their lives."[15]

In my estimation, the scepticism towards ethnographies that try to get at the felt quality of experience arises from the way it has been handled in academic circles, labelled or associated with the term "emotion" (i.e. "discourse of emotions", the "emotions of experience")[16]. But to talk about the sensory condition that animates experience (a "felt understanding") in terms of "emotion" only, is somewhat misleading. There is a great difference between the urges that drive emotions and the more physical, broader, and sensate properties that are at play when making sense of a problem.

Afterwords

Late one night, after everyone had gone home to sleep, a group of us gathered in Tancho's outdoor kitchen to drink some sugar-cane alcohol. It had been clandestinely smuggled into the community by don Silvio, the local *coyote*. We recollected some wild blades of grass to make "lemon tea", ignited the coals of the kitchen fire, and began brewing the leaves in the boiling water. After a while, when the flames of the fire began to die down, I picked up a dried corncob that was laying by my feet. I intended to throw it into the flames. But before I could set the fire ablaze with it, Félix, noticing what I was about to do, cut his speech short and abruptly stopped me. He explained that they "do not burn the cobs because it would be like burning the bones of a fellow person." His explanation did not make sense to me because I had seen how people, after peeling the kernels off, discarded the cobs with the least sign of consideration, letting them rot all over the place. I explained to him that the concern and apprehension he was manifesting was not congruent with what I had seen, that leaving the cobs to rot in the muddy courtyards seemed to be even more wasteful since they were not used at all. "No", he replied, "the cobs are never wasted. They are the force that the corn borrowed from our holy soil. When the cobs rot, they go back to being soil again. The earth needs its force back so that the next year it can lend it again to our *milpas*."

This incident took place three weeks after I had arrived in Rio Negro and became one of the cornerstones of my research. From a technical and biological point of view, I could grapple with the idea that rotten cobs decompose into organic matter to fertilise the earth. But, for people of Rio Negro, this process exceeds any biological explanation. Félix's choice of words and the way he phrased his answer reflected a view that is "pregnant"[1] with a significance that is deeply cultural. For him, the earth and corn are not only vital participants of a larger cosmology but are also apotheosised to a level that is replete with divine value and force. The next day I thought about what he had said, of how he perceived the world and the degree of significance that he attached to things.

Referring to the difficulty of translating across cultures, Keith Basso wrote that "the problem we face is a semiotic one, a barrier to constructing appropriate sense and significance."[2] Indeed, to make sense of Rio's ways of being and convey the significance that corn (or don Hilario's debts) has for local villagers, I faced this difficulty. This was the question I kept asking myself that night while talking to Félix and the rest of the group: how to grasp (and then convey to the reader) the poignancy and significance of his conviction, the force of his belief? How to talk about the earth as a vital being in such a way that is congruous and "makes sense" to the reader without simply "romanticising the other", sounding sentimental or enigmatic.

To do this, to make some sense of the culture of the Mexican *campesino*, I began to work from the "ground up", mapping out the aesthetic values of Rio's culture so as to lay out the patterns and commonsensical idiosyncrasies that weave the village into a cultural whole. My approach to culture, however, differs from the semiotic approach suggested by Basso. I agree that the crux of translating across cultures is in "constructing appropriate sense and significance". But, in my estimation, the road to take is not semiotics. To analyse and interpret Tancho's actions in terms of symbolic representations and systems of meanings does not go far enough. My own experience told me that a semiotic approach was limited for the task since it did not convey fully the life of a Mexican *campesino* as he or she experienced it in Tepoztlán or Tacámbaro. In my estimation, finding significance in the world is about appreciation, about an empathic form of experience where one assesses the vital impact that an event, an idea, or an object delivers. The significance of Nestor's invigorating stories, for instance, does not lie with symbolic meanings and metaphoric structures only, but with how they entertain, disgust, or delight people. Thus, to make sense of the Mexican *campesinato* I took a different tack in methodology and treated culture phenomenologically, attending to experience in more sensate (and less cognate) terms.

By sketching the aesthetic values that pattern life in Rio, I intended to create a map (as opposed to a territory) of local anatomies. In this way, I hoped to aquatint the reader with the somatic

sensibilities that pattern local life so that, in the end, the reader would know something of how a pain hurts, a joy felt, or health experienced. For instance, to make sense of don Hilario's debts (how he experienced "low standards of living") we explored how his pain and anxiety tied into cultural notions of integrity, honesty, and dignity --of how he feared that his word of honour would be eroded by his default on his loan payments. "He would no longer be taken seriously", as his son explained.

Similarly, once we had mapped out the basic, embodied values that mark moments of health and well being --which for people of Rio include values of wholesomeness and cohesion-- we were able to enter into a much richer conversation about the configuration of the village, from single families into a village cluster; or, as we saw with Nestor's invigorating stories, how people experience health in a group. When a person falls ill, when there is a vacuum of vitality, there is a danger for the body to fall into a helix of retreat and isolation, loosing "will" and force at every turn. The danger of this retreat is that, if not stopped, a person can plummet into deep despair and, like hypothermia, lose the condition to generate its own vitality and sense of well being. To avoid this and maintain themselves healthy and vigorous, local *campesinos* resort to group cohesion to drive lethargy and despair away, displacing unwanted feelings. The informal gathering I described in chapter two serves this purpose, working to stop the helix from unfolding by reintegrating a person back into the everyday life, re-routing a person's feelings of detachment and isolation into a context of health and vitality.

The advantage of this approach is that through these stories we, as ethnographers, can gain access to the culturally shaped experiences that people in Rio Negro find most significant, and so learn about the force and intensity with which people in another culture value life. With a prelude that attends to the felt immediacies and embodied values we can grasp, for instance, how a sense of compactness and wholesomeness helps soothe anxiety and fear; or how a fiesta amuses and delights people.

Last, I would like to come back to a point I made earlier. I opened this work by talking about the field of 'development', although abrupt and in general terms. I suggested that the new brand of models we have today (i.e., "sustainable development"), marks a vital "turning point" in the way we feel, make sense of, and understand development activity. Mainly, because attention is no longer concentrated on constructing political structures and economic systems alone, but in how these changes impact the sensory grounds of people and nature. I believe that this is what we are trying to get at with our categories of "well being", "levels of satisfaction", and "quality of life"; categories that try to report on the "felt quality" of people's experiences --on how, for instance, feelings of salubrity, sorrow, and comfort, tie into moments of poverty or good health.

This qualitative bent, however, has been more symbolic than factual. So far, the efforts of most policy makers and academics to qualify development activity have only gone as far as creating quantitative categories and forms of ethnographic realism. But due to the mere analytical nature of these perspectives (i.e. their commitment to objectivist methodologies), they fail to account for the vital condition that animates experience. The consequences of this methodological handicap, as I have tried to point out, are great. To approach development in terms of symbolic form, perception, and interpretation, as opposed to talk about it in terms of performance, sentience, and experience, means that we reduce the significance of our projects to only analytical insights and cognitive criteria. But to approach living beings as "semiotic systems", and thus attending primarily to what social performances "mean" and "are about", we neglect to consider how development changes contribute (or hinder) to people's sensorioums --for how they might engage, delight, or disturb a person. The result: development models that depart from a perspective where value is equated, for instance, with the number of jobs that a factory can produce, but little in how working in an assembly line from nine-to-five might enrich a person's sense of well being, in its sensory form.

In Rio, this clash of views and cultural understandings is most vividly expressed in the way local villagers, and visiting agronomers, make sense of cultivating coffee. For agronomers, the value

of the project lies with technical solutions that, to use their own lexicon, are primarily about "structures", "systems", "relations", and "forms of organization". Their concern is to create a self-sustainable system by implementing the following steps: modernise production, increase yields, integrate Rio's economy to an international system, improve the physical health of people, and upgrade the education level of the town. After a community meeting, I approached a group of three agronomers. When I asked them how they define a people's "health", one of them answered that they *measure* it with "data about mortality rates, number of vaccinations per year, houses with running water", and similar statistics.[3] People of Rio Negro, on the other hand, refer to "well being" in more vital ways and as an integral part of a larger cosmology. When I asked Nestor what "well being" entails, he explained that, besides physical fortitude, it is also a matter that concerns how the person "feels, depending on whether the person has *animos* and force to engage in life". Indeed, don Hilario was considered ill because he lacked bodily disposition and wit, an illness that afflicted his spirit in ways that cannot be properly accounted for by the agronomers' criteria of health.

As I see it, the real advantage of a "sensate approach" to development is that, through it, we can get to know another culture in its vital form; as it feels, knows, and understands the world on its "own terms". With such a sentient understanding we, as ethnographers and policy makers, can design projects that will transcend the limitations of current models and contribute to a methodology that breaches meaning with sensory value. In this sense, the value of the North American Free Trade Agreement, for instance, would not simply be about producing jobs in assembly plants and controlling for environmental pollution, but in how the creation of jobs, in their vital form, contributes (or hinders) to people's dignity, joy, and delight. Significance, in this light, directly relates to forms of comprehension that engage not just an intellectual approach but also entails a sentient understanding.

I'm aware that these concluding remarks fall on idealistic grounds, especially given the current geopolitical tendency to set neoliberal policy as the only alternative for progress. But,

ultimately, isn't this what we, as societies, are striving for? In my estimation, goals such as "well being" and "satisfaction" certainly allude to this, to a type of development that makes life worth living, rather than on how we can routinely live through it. In the end, the purpose is not to reduce the world to an "scenography"[1] where life is mechanically reproduced into systems and symbols, but to allow the various cultures of the globe to follow their own trajectories as a condition of growth.

Notes

Chapter One

[1] Capra, 1982.
[2] Turner, 1967.
[3] Geertz, 1983.
[4] Turner, 1984: 186.
[5] Desjarlais, 1992: 247.
[6] Kapferer, 1986: 192.
[7] Rosaldo, 1984: 190.
[8] Bateson, 1979.
[9] Jackson, 1989: 122.
[10] Johnson, 1987: 190.
[11] The phrase is meant to echo one of Neruda's poems where death "is like a suit without a man" in search for life. Only when death "licks the ground" to "find the dead", can it breath and be "dressed up as an admiral." Similarly, ours is a search for the man inside the suit, the voice inside the throat, the pain bounded in sorrow.
[12]See, for instance, Stoller, 1989; Csordas, 1990; Obeyesekere, 1981.
[13]Merleau-Ponty, 1964:122.
[14] See, for instance, Rosaldo's (1984) account on how "the cultural force of emotions" of Ilongot society animates a headhunter's sense of grief and rage.
[15] Barry, 1992.
[16] Fincas are extensive family-own estates oriented towards large scale monocropping or cattle ranching. *Finqueros*, the owners of the estate, usually form part of the Mexican oligarchy and act as both patron and client to an almost all Indian population. Some fifty years ago, before emancipation reached Chiapas, labour in the fincas used to be much more servitudial, with the peons working the fields as well as attending to house chores. Today, however, labour is more contractual in character, limited to picking, washing, and processing the harvests.
[17] El Triunfo, 1993: 7.
[18] The terms comes from White (1990: 64) referring to sociocultural institutions such as the family and social networks.
[19] Desjarlais, 1992: 14.
[20] Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990: 7.
[21] It would be useful to note that my use of the term 'discourse' departs from the way linguists use it to refer to the exchange of communication via speech. My use of the term follows the more pragmatic, less syntactical, approach taken by the recent literature on emotions that treats discourse in the Foucautian sense: of a range of mediated communication practices via a set of specific cultural understandings that include speech, gestures, and the use of codes that convey the "unsaid" and moments of silence
[22] Abu-Lughod, 1990: 7.
[23] Myers, 1988: 106
[24] ibid.: 4.
[25] Jackson, 1989.
[26] Abu-Lughod, 1990: 28
[27] ibid.: 36.
[28] ibid.
[29] Basso, 1984: 36.
[30] Fernandez, 1986.
[31] Huxley, 1977: 16.
[32] Desjarlais, 1992: 176.

[33] Geertz, 1986: 373.
[34] Huxley, 1977; 13.
[35] Geertz, 1986: 373.

Chapter Two: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life

[1] During the whole year, when villagers are in need of money and cannot find seasonal labour, they often compromise their coffee at bargaining prices to a middleman. Basically, this means that local *campesinos* 'pre-sell' their harvest before the coffee has even been picked. As the term implies, compromising their coffee is an agreement that rides on people's "word of honour", committing themselves to honouring their reputation and integrity as a man of trust. During my visit, I often witnessed how people handed over their sacks of coffee to the middleman who visited Rio without seeing any money touch their hands.
[2] Geertz, 1986.
[3] Desjarlais, 1992: 14.
[4] ibid.: 197.
[5] Iser, 1978: 70.
[6] Bruner and Gorfain, 1988: 71-72.
[7] Desjarlais, 1992: 71.
[8] Johnson, 1987: 37.
[9] Ibid.: 71.
[10] West, 1994.
[11] The phrase comes from Fernandez, who believes that a sense of "wholeness is a product of certain kinds of imaginative --that is, visualising or pictorializing--activity." He holds that by way of analogy and association, an image can create a snowball effect where images of "one domain of experience" revitalise other images in different domains. The domino effect, then, continues until a complete understanding of the whole is achieved. Thus, he concludes that "a person's relation to his or her clan is as the tree's relation to the forest; or, the heart is to the body as the centre is to the circle, as the cattle kraal is to the Zulu homestead." In Rio, something similar happens. Since feelings of integrity and cohesion are intrinsic to health and well being, villagers have created a set of social relations that, as a whole, weaves all members into an integral web of fathers, sisters, cousins, and compadres. If a household is not related by kin to some other family clan, then the adults of that household (not necessarily the parents) become *compadres* with an established village member and so integrate their families within the social web of the town.
[12] Coleridge, 1967.

Chapter Three: From a Social History to a Village Cluster

[1] Garcia de Leon, 1985.
[2] Just like the body is a unified whole unto itself but interrelated to other family members, a clan, and a community, so is the is the *ejido* a unified whole, yet interdependent with other *ejidos*, a municipality, and a district. The reserve is divided into three municipalities, and each is formed by at least three ejidos. Rio Negro, is a *barrio* (a regional quarter) of the *ejido* Toluca, and belongs to the municipality of Jaltenango.
[3] *Chapines* is a derogatory term used to refer to illegal Guatemalan workers.
[4] The nick-name "*coyote*" is a specific one, referring to an old relationship that rural *campesinos* have had with the wild animal. Specifically, it refers to the *nahual* (soul) of the animal: to the astutcity of *coyote* to wait until people are off-guard before ambushing villagers' chickens. The *coyote*, so it goes, is always present in the vicinities of the town, yet it is never considered a member as such. The same goes for the middlemen of the region, they are always around, "waiting for the best opportunity to take advantage of people's desperate situations", as one woman described them. Like their animal counterpart who is always present but never an "insider", the *coyotes* of the region always form part of the everyday life of the communities but they are never considered members.

[5] Attwood, 1992.
[6] Ostrom, 1990.

Chapter Four

[1] Desjarlais, 1992.
[2] Traven, 1985: 97-117.
[3] Basso, 1988: 26.
[4] Unlike other studies which find that ghosts and spirits bewitch people by "casting evil spells" on them, people in Rio attribute the success of "spirit loss" to the ghost's capacity to distract, lure, and captivate a distracted soul. I find the difference to be an important one: while the former portrays people as semi-passive and simply receptive to a ghost's actions, people in Rio Negro understand the process of "enchantment" within a context of discourse and negotiation. Seen from this light, "enchantment" refers to a situation of struggle, where ghosts try to lure people to inflict malaise while the latter, depending on the fortitude of each person, try to resists being captivated by the spell. This clarification is useful when trying to understand why local people try to behave in ways that bring integrity and fortitude.
[5] For a rich study on the phenomenology of olfaction see *The Varieties of Sensory Experience* edited by David Howes.
[6] As quoted by Garcia de Leon, 1989: 31.
[7] bid
[8] Tedlock, 1993: 1.
[9] p.189
[10] p. 190
[11] Sheff, 1977.
[12] Desjarlais, 1992: 35.
[13] Sheff, 1977: 486.
[14] ibid.
[15] Desjarlais, p. 247.
[16] See, for instance, Abu-Lughhod and Lutz, 1992.

Afterwords

[1] The phrase comes from Huxley (1956: 13) to refer to the vivid imagery that the "pregnant words of poets" evoke.
[2] Basso, 1984: 29.
[3]Note that the three agronomers working with the people of Rio, and the Institute as a whole, work according to the international guide lines set by the World Wildlife Foundation, an organization under the auspices of the United Nations.
[4]Ascot, 1978: 23.

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