

Bananas and Citizens

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Bananas are only one example of how, in the contemporary world, we are all unavoidably interconnected with the lives and landscapes of people and places around the globe. Globalisation means that wherever we are, our lives impact on far distant others. How do people get to have a say in what the shape of these global connections should be: in the sorts of connections that are established, and in their form and nature? How do we, as banana growers and as banana eaters, as producers and consumers, and as people, get to have a say in what these connections look like?

This is not, of course, just a question of bananas. Rather it is a question of the need for new sorts of citizenship which reflect the fact that our lives are not simply lived out in scales and places where citizenship is institutionalised by the nation-state and other national bodies.

This is a question of new sorts of global citizenship, where we get to have a say on issues which go far beyond the country where we live. If our lives are connected to all sorts of rights, responsibilities and risks that operate at the global scale, through for example the food that we eat, questions of global citizenship are about how we manage to have a dialogue, conversation and action with others who are involved in these connections. John Urry (2000) has called this a "citizenship of flows": an idea of citizenship which involves talking about the rights, responsibilities, risks and duties involved in global connectivity.

So how can both producers and consumers have a conversation about bananas? One of the things that unites both ends of the global connection is that both banana growers and banana eaters care about bananas. Commodities are used to care for others (Miller 1998), and bananas are used in very ordinary and everyday ways to create care: buying sufficient bananas during the weekly shop to make sure that there are enough for people to take to work and school, mashing bananas as one of the first solid foods for babies, slicing bananas so they fit into small hands and mouths. As 'Exchange Values' shows through the smell of bananas which surrounds the dried skins, a banana is a pleasurable thing. So amongst consumers, care for bananas exists, but it exists at particular scales which are often about the scale of household, the local. Caring for our 'nearest and dearest' is important: there are caring things which we can only do if we are close to people. But it also raises questions about the geography of care (Smith 1999). How do we care not only for the local scale, but also care for distant others along commodity chains? How do we build care-at-a-distance? In what spaces can this care be developed, nurtured, founded, articulated and discussed? In other words, how is the care involved in global citizenship to be built? This is where I think Shelley Sacks' work can be seen as important. Because global care and citizenship are built into 'Exchange Values' in at least two important ways. Firstly, the artwork itself opens up a space in which connections are talked about. The project creates a form of global civil society, in which space is created for dialogue about connections. And where Shelley Sacks' ideas on social sculpture are particularly interesting is in the thought that global civil society is not only created in the gallery, but in the production of the artwork as well: through 'Exchange Values' global civil society meets on the High Street, on farms in the Caribbean and in corporate offices. The art is not a catalyst for global civil society: it is global civil society.

Secondly, 'Exchange Values' creates a form of global civil society which is based in aesthetic experience as much as intellectual knowledge. Ian Cook and Phil Crang (1996) have pointed out the dangers of top-down 'consumer education' approaches to consumer politics, based in the idea that simply by revealing the conditions of production behind a commodity, the 'informed consumer' will automatically put pressure on unjust global connections. That strategy can have its uses, but aesthetic images which produce a feeling of global belonging, identity, and care are important in the formation of global citizenship (Szerszynski and Toogood 2000). If national symbols were crucial to formation of national citizenship, then so to are the intangible uses of global aesthetic symbols (from iconic images of rainforests to cartoon spinning globes) in forming a sense of global citizenship which is difficult to describe.

Exchange Values creates global civil society through both a discursive and a non-discursive appeal. Understanding more about bananas is complimented and extended by the smell of banana, the millions of whispering voices underlining the absence of all the producers that we cannot see, the numbered 'sheets' of

beautiful, but painful stretched skin, linked to each numbered, but invisible producer. All of these elements move us towards an experience of global citizenship. In Shelly Sacks' words, they allow us to think "in another mode".

So, one can say that 'Exchange Values' is a form of global civil society that is created through a range of aesthetic engagements and experiences - through feeling and image as well as words, text and conversation. But there are still questions. What do people do with these perceptions and feelings? Where from here? What do consumers do once they know about bananas? How can we know everything about all the products we buy? What if the product were fruit cake, where lots of little bits come from all over the place? Or clothes, which go backwards and forwards around the globe before they hit our shops?

'Exchange Values' works alongside other organisations beyond the art world, because care-at-a-distance necessarily involves institutions which mediate between distant places. Although 'social sculpture' as an expanded and interdisciplinary art practice extends outside the normal sphere of art, other institutions are important in intervening and changing the nature of global connections. This is where the links between social sculpture projects and NGOs such as Banana Link are so important, as they offer a way of institutionalising the forms, experiences and understandings of global citizenship that are built up through projects like 'Exchange Values'.

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