Matter that transforms, transformations that matter

Responses to modernity from rural Brazil

"We

*can't solve problems
by using the same kind of
thinking we used when*

we created

them."

-Albert Einstein-

MSc thesis

International Development Studies

Elizabeth Hirschegger,

March 2012

Matter that transforms, transformations that matter

Responses to modernity from rural Brazil

Elizabeth Hirschegger

Thesis submitted for fulfillment of the Msc program:
Sociology of Rural Development

Supervised by Dr. Alberto Arce

Program code: RDS-80436
Registration number: 851021341040

Wageningen University and Research center,

March 2012

Abstract

This thesis contributes to the understanding of social and environmental risks in modernity by focusing on the reflexive practices of a variety of rural communities in Brazil. The study of community practices challenges the institutional boundaries of modernity by revealing multiple views on progress and acknowledging the role and characteristics of vital matter in socio-environmental production. Material and institutional boundaries within such production are not solid. Rather, all is vibrant interactive matter, able to form alliances that increase its vitality and able to transform.

Voor Marietje ☺❤

Foreword and acknowledgements

Finally, in front of you lies my story. It is a story shaped by an accumulation of experiences, that in turn have been co-shaped by all the interacting matter –people and 'stuff'- surrounding and trespassing me. During the years of my studies, I have been confronted with much of the same: the story of global misery. Without a single doubt this has strongly influenced my story as it has pushed me to look for solutions, ways out of that story and above all, other stories. Luckily, I found many. This story is shaped by the stories of all the great people that I met during my field research. Or more correctly, by the assemblage of their experiences with mine. The time is right to spread and share a multiplicity of diverse stories on life, progress, struggle and celebration that coexist on our planet and I'm excited to be able to contribute to this. The reader might recognize this story or find parts of it occurring within the own surroundings. Becoming aware of the many stories 'out there' is a step towards reconsidering and revaluating our own surroundings and boundaries and therewith, who knows, towards rethinking progress.

The one thing that has become clear to me in particular during the development of this thesis is the following: Every division we create is nothing but a swindle! This realization, although somehow bringing relief, did not come to me smoothly. In fact, I can now say that it has been a wear out, characterized by endless doubt and anxiety. Throughout my case studies, I had already experienced the ambiguity of boundaries and the interactions, cooperations and interdependencies of people and their surroundings as dynamic and complex processes rather than dichotomies of any kind. And I myself was transformed in this process. I was getting to know my own boundaries by realizing they were challenged and changing. Excited I returned from the field as I was to organize this thesis in a way that could not be knocked down. Back home and with some proper theoretical support, I thought that I would manage to organize and process my load of data in a clear and logical way. Unfortunately, each attempt to organize -my thesis, my thoughts, my life- seemed to fail as somehow I felt the need to deconstruct any imperfect organization myself and start over. Again and again and each time a bit more restlessly, since time and dreams were on my mind. Again I was getting to know my boundaries, but this time by pushing and challenging them myself from within. Until at one point I came to accept for this thesis, that there is no such thing as perfect and solid divisions. Things can't be 'perfect' in a framed sense, they overlap, interact, develop. Of course! Nothing stands on its own. Everything is interacting matter. Division and organization –order- is only what we continuously attempt to construct to have some grip on life, to stay calm and keep ourselves together. The perfect structure might not exist.

But: *"We stay modern people. We want to create a better order"*, as Bauman recently stated in an interview (De Volkskrant, February 4th). With this in mind I continued organizing my thoughts and data, each time a bit more aware and a bit more calm. For the reader I hope to have organized this thesis in a way that will guide you calmly and preferably pleased

towards the same conclusion: All matter interacts and transforms, while some transformations seem to matter more than others. For me, these are transformations guided by the search for truth, and social justice and therewith, guided by love.

Apart from sharing their stories with me, the people I lived with have touched my heart and changed my life. This concerns my new Brazilian friends as well as my old and newer friends, my house-mates and my family. A special thanks goes to my supervisor Alberto Arce for sharing his precious time with me, for following as well as challenging my thoughts, for providing me with inspiring literature, for his patience and for having some faith in my product. A big thanks goes also to my semi-formal second supervisor Michi, who is somehow able to make my thoughts dance.

Parts of this product is theirs:

Didi, thanks for sharing your stories and lifestyle. It was this special place that opened up my eyes and heart, things that have eased the rest of my journey. Tapeshwar, thank you for introducing me to people and places, for your wisdom and for showing me to appreciate all that we receive from life. Brazilian students of life; Marina, Djalma, Juh, Tadeu, Helson and friends in Brasilia and Livia and friends in Viçosa. You have amazed me with your views and energetic ways and it would be great to meet again. Goiás; Yogi, Aguia and Sat. Bahia; Claudia and Aroldo; Bruno Guerrerão, I wish for your dreams to come only closer. Campina and friends, this place has caught, taught and surprised me in many ways.

My family; muy queridos papis, Maria Johanna Doeswijk y Gabriel Hirschegger, gracias por su coraje, paciencia y las oportunidades que me dieron para formarme hasta una Liza por fin licenciada. Brothers and sista, los quiero mucho. Thank you for being around in the weekends, for asking about my thesis and for remembering my account-number. I also thank Isabel for sharing her views on the animation of stuff and Tobi for being so wonderful. Friends, you are many and lovely. Thanks for studying the same 'misery', thanks for colorfully dealing with your lives and thanks for being involved in mine. If you only had a clue how much I appreciate you there: Eline, Marije, Floor, Daan, Mirte, Edwin, Eduard, Elisa, Janne, Poposky, Tasha and off course Nout. Nout, thanks for the incredible support and for sharing so much with me through the years. Karin and Faffiage, you should not have left me before this thesis was finished, but I forgive you and thank you very much for suddenly showing up in my life. All the residents and friends of H15 I have to thank for the well spend times. Woutine Pauw and housemates, thank you for hosting me the last month. Last but not least, my dear house, the *Palace of Love*, in the center of the world. Thanks for the chats, meals, support and the very necessary distraction.

Happy reading!

Executive summary

Modernity has brought to the fore a highly industrialized system of food production that has resulted in a set of manufactured socio-environmental risks. Awareness of, and experiences with these outcomes as well as the increasing difficulty of 'traditional' institutions –such as states, markets and our 'modern' thinking- to deal with them, have resulted in the formation of several kinds of communities in rural Brazil. This thesis has focused on three types of such communities in order to answer the main question of research: *How do these communities respond to modern social and environmental risks and how do their practices challenge the boundaries of modern institutions?*

By exploring three types of communities, this thesis demonstrates that social practices embody the construction of experience as well as meaning and are therefore able to reveal the (re)creation of reality and views on progress. It is found and emphasised that in the creation of experience as well as meaning, and therewith of reality and views on progress, the non-human surroundings play a vital role. The social construction of meaning is influencing as well as influenced by the vibrancy of matter that the practices surround. The acceleration of global interactions that is taking place, is responsible for the blend and distribution of knowledge that is reflexive on modernity. In practice we can find 'new' boundaries; ways of thinking, relating as well as producing.

In the first case the role of food comes to light. Member's practices of this community surround extraordinary food to which they attribute meaning. Specific types of foodstuffs are seen as able to either blur the mind and weaken the body or vitalize the body and mind, enabling higher states of consciousness that serve individuals to work on their ego, to improve their thoughts as well as their associations to the surroundings. The meaning attributed to the food is guiding production and consumption practices, whereas the matters of production and consumption influence and transform the mood, thoughts and acts. The food is also able to reveal the globalized network of this neohumanist movement as well as a blend of knowledge in sustainable technologies that are used for its production.

From the second case, the centrality of a vital brew comes to the fore. In social practice, different meanings are attached to this assemblage while the brew after consumption invokes strong transformations in body and mind. The consumption of this tea results in altered states of consciousness that can be found resonating in member's speech, acts and views on life and progress. The consumption of this tea at rituals unfolds a blend of believe systems from different times and spaces. Their agricultural practices are not central but important and focused on a 'harmony' in nature.

The practices of the third case surround land to which political, emotional and practical meaning is attributed by the social movement and its members. The vital character of the land comes about through debates on property and sustainability.

The land is able to reveal local, national as well as globalized links, cooperations and partnerships to other movements, organizations, countries and individuals with whom knowledge is exchanged.

Responses of community members differ as their experiences are dependent on the people as well as the 'stuff' – such as land, food and policies- they interact and have interacted with. The boundaries of the communities and their institutions are membrane-like and therewith the rootedness of rules and values varies. The first case reveals clear rules on how to behave, which members can choose to follow. The second case can be called 'liquid' as people are very mobile, making it hard for rules to root and rule. Rather than rules there are shared values of respect. Community members of the third case are provided with a well developed political model in which companionship is emphasised.

What the communities have in common is the embodiment of a globalized knowledge that is reflexive on the means and consequences of modernity. Both the social as environmental interactions are being transformed from accentuating competition to accentuating cooperation. This cooperation is not about controlling nature or 'the other'. Rather, it is about controlling control through the generating of knowledge on matter in this other and nature. This increases feelings of brotherhood and a high sensibility for risks towards which responsibility is taken within the community.

Outline

1. Introduction

From atoms to thoughts, everything we know is in vibrant motion. When we take a look at the development of society, some clear symbols of transition periods can be presented and agreed upon (Giddens, 1996; Beck, 1997). More commonly however, the old is exchanged for something new, continuously and fluently rather than structurally. Such change can be observed as '*transformations in the very structure of everyday life*' (Giddens, 1996: 153). What we observe is change brought about by countless forces, including our own. If today we are to call our society "modernity", we are viewing ourselves in a transition from the old to the new. We are expressing a consciousness that is reflexive on the past. The thesis deals with this consciousness by studying new practices within the context of 'the old'. In this introduction, background information is provided on this 'old', referred to as modernity, that leads to the study of new practices. With this background in mind, the problems that we face today will be stated. These include the harsh outcomes of modernity as well as the difficulties of dealing with these outcomes in practice and theory. The problem statement flows into the objectives, questions and boundaries of this research.

> "*With varying content, the term "modern" again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as a result of a transition from the old to the new*"
>
> (Habermas, 1985:3).

1.1 Background information

Society now has been facing the social and environmental impacts of previous expressions of modernity. Expressions characterized by a logic of resource allocation based on efficiency and economic growth and buttressed by neoliberal policies across the globe. The impacts could be understood as the (unintended) consequences of a globally implemented (policy) utopia given shape by innovative economic models and technological developments. Today we can find manifold ways of expressing consciousness towards this past, a past with a linear view on progress that is conservatively still embedded within several institutions of our times such as markets, politics, practices and minds. '*In the west, at least*' Giddens (1996: 151) writes, '*we are all the legatees of certain strands of enlightenment thought*', we want to know in order to make progress. He remarks however that within this thought '*the progress of well-founded knowledge is more or less the same as progressive expansion of human domination*'. In other words, we have been wanting to know in order to dominate our surroundings, to be in control of the world and arrange that world according to the wish for greater welfare.

Some expressions that can be found today and have developed over the last few decades against this scene of modernity, are able to demonstrate remarkable features. These rejections

of and reflections on modernity have their own visions of how the future world should or is going to be. Based upon a consciousness or 'knowledge' that predominantly involves the acknowledgement of the outcomes of previous forms of human domination, links are revealed between this tendency of domination and the perceptions of man as separate from nature. The expressions of discontent and resistance towards these outcomes reveal unique expressions of freedom and progress. If we are to study such expressions, we have to '*embrace the understanding of heterotopias, composed of multiple contested meanings and practices*' (Arce, 2009:279). Different views on progress relate to the different practices in the field.

This calls for the acknowledgement of -and study on- the existence of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2000), an idea that '*presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world-indeed to explain the history of modernity- is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs*' (Eisenstadt 2002: 9). '*These ongoing reconstructions of multiple institutional and ideological patterns*', Eisenstadt continues, '*are carried forward by specific social actors in close connection with social, political and intellectual activists, and also by social movements, pursuing different programs of modernity, holding very different views on what makes society modern*'. In other words, these modernities are carried forward through specific social actors that are questioning what real progress is. These are actors that are experimenting with (re)considered views on progress and manage to collect company. The movements they carry forwards are assigned with theories that meet with practices. These practices have the potential to bind a group, to create new order and to construct reflexive communities. '*Through the engagement of these actors with broader sectors of their respective societies, unique expressions of modernity are realized*', Eisenstadt goes on. This 'multiplicity of cultural programs' can be seen as a challenge for the frames of modernity and each 'program' or community in its turn can provide us with valuable messages for future goals and practices.

These contemporary expressions of consciousness are transitions that can best be portrayed with a focus on practices that occur around a set of matters. These are matters such as land and food to which people feel connected and that co-shape their experiences and practices. Practices around such matters -that will be elaborated upon in the next chapters- bring to light the social and environmental production as well as the consumption of food. These practices around such matter embody views and reflections on modernity and food. Food -whether available or not- is a motif through the days of each one of us. While a large share of our population is currently starving, the luckier ones are worried about its price, appearance, status, calories, rates of nutrition or ways and means of production. Ironically, if we try to understand how the hungry got hungry -or why socio-environmental justice is organized as it is- we are turned towards ways and means of consumption and production. A focus on a set of matters of new reflexive food producing (and consuming) rural communities is appropriate to illustrate and analyze the effects of modernization on the one hand, and the new consciousness of the performed reactions on the other.

Perceptions of problems and the conducts of coping with these problems are part of the variety in reflexive understanding that characterizes modernity (Arce, personal communication). This diversity in reflexive understandings has led us to generate different modern associations that go beyond 'traditional' institutions like 'the family' or the economic order based on the enterprise, such as 'the farm' or 'the firm'. These conditions have oriented this study towards exploring types of these new associations among rural communities, in order to challenge the orthodox debates on modernity as well as the boundaries of modern institutions.

Studying reflexive rural communities involved in the sustainable production of food, enables new insights on structuration and cohesion to be revealed. They challenge notions of geographical and social boundaries as well as the notion of a singular modernity. We are facing fluid rather than fixed entities in which people are confronted with different 'structures' very hastily (Bauman, 2004). This can either result in processes of individualisation –Castells (2006:9) for example states that "*the notion of the stable, predictable, professional career is eroded, as relationships between capital and labour are individualised and contractual labour conditions escape collective bargaining*"- or, in interactions leading to rejections that shape the creation of new communities based on e.g. shared values and ideologies. The accelerating flows of people, information and knowledge on the risks of contemporary society that form part of globalization, notably the social and environmental harms following from global agrifood systems and policies, are relevant aspects of these processes (Beck, 1992). To better understand the role of matter to reactions, the study of the social organization and the individual trajectories are important. The exploration of these new types of associations will therefore include the acknowledgement of a plurality of institutional forms, lifestyles and worldviews and an evaluation of their reflexive practices.

1.2 Problem statement

Despite of the relative successes of modernity and modernization policies, such as new inventions, technologies and an increase in local and global interactions, some of the endeavors have resulted in contemporary social issues such as uncontrolled urbanization and structural individualisation, violence, social exclusion, inequality, poverty and hunger - as approached by Bauman (2004) as *culture of waste*- and environmental issues such as deforestation, land degradations, the depletion of natural resources, air pollution, water pollution, floods and droughts (Beck, 1999). The conventional system of food production illustrates its effects and its logic that can be traced back to economics, and has been incorporated in politics as well as worldviews and lifestyles. The implementation of this system of food production has a history in industrialization, capitalism and (neo-)colonialism that has evolved with the levels of consciousness, worldviews and attitudes of people; consumers, producers, politicians, scholars and activists alike.

An important cause of the social and environmental problems related to food production is the radical modernization (liberalization of markets and industrialization) of agriculture, the 'rise of empires' (van der Ploeg, 2010) and the characteristic 'double squeeze' (van der Ploeg, 2006) that is involved. High input prices on the one hand and low prices for their products on the other, force farmers around the world to either leave or upscale their farm. Following van der Ploeg, the current agricultural and food crisis is "*the complex outcome of several combined processes, including the industrialization of agriculture, the liberalization of food and agricultural markets and the rise of food empires*" (2010: abstract) that "*increasingly govern the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food*" (2010:99) and basically entails "*the impossibility of reproducing industrialized farming*"(2010:105). The continuous and intensive up-scaling is ecologically unsustainable, meaning that negative, often irreversible impacts have been realized and that it cannot proceed as it's destroying the conditions on which it depends (Beck, 1992). The ecological impacts range from the clearing of rich forests to the pollution of vital natural resources. The impacts on social life are illustrated by farmers unable to compete and migrating to alien places, cities and countries and the institutions of places, cities and countries unable to adequately handle with migrants resulting in high unemployment rates, poverty and violence. Food-products produced under the stated double squeeze and the associated technologies and organization of production, at their turn come to form a risk to the health of people. Food safety is continuously evaluated and has a high priority in policies. But by neglecting the nonhuman environment, this food becomes a risk to human health anyhow. Examples of such risks that pop up in the news every once in a while and are the often referred to BSE epidemic and the recent dioxin in eggs (Oosterveer, 2002; Beck, 2011). Due to the transnational, political and economic character of the risks involved, responsibility and accountability become blurred, making it hard for markets, governments and transnational organizations as for families or households to adequately deal with (Beck, 1999).

Due to an increasing intensity, expansion and velocity of information flows, people are becoming gradually aware of the risks that come along with this system of food production and its correlated policies. Society is demanding change. Consumers in the west are becoming aware of and dissent with the social and environmental circumstances on the production-side of their products and are subsequently demanding fair, organic, local and healthy products. Activists are putting pressure on climate-change debates. And, although barely of the kinds so popular in the 70s, protests against oil leaks, nuclear energy and coal plants can again be found (Hawken, 2007). At the same time however, markets, governments and transnational organizations seem unable to deal with the range of globalized risks that characterize our days (Beck, 1999). As these risks seem complicated to fathom and deal with, focus is put on relieving the various symptoms or responsibility is simply passed on to other parties or actors.

Besides putting pressure on markets and politicians, people are also creating a difference by enacting responsibility themselves. All around the world we can find all kinds of creative initiatives that need to be studied as they question, surpass, counter and thus reduce the apparent domination of modern institutions, the global agrifood system and its policies. The study of reflexive practices of rural communities and the role of the nonhuman in this adds to knowledge on reflexivity and boundaries in modernity.

With the accumulation of environmental impacts and inconveniences for people, it is increasingly affirmed that modernity (both as concept and compliance) and modernization policies are running behind on the present (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1999; Esteva & Prakash, 1998). *"Due to a lack of more detailed evidence and research, some policies remained rather conservative and keep repeating the same universal objectives without addressing the significant changes that people are performing themselves. These changes can be identified as social and technical experiments that need to be studied as they might provide some elements to understand the failure of existing institutions and the actions of some actors to find solutions to their social, political and technical challenges in contemporary societies. It is here where we are confronted with critically assessing a set of theoretical concepts which have until now been very effective in understanding the world, yet seem rather restrictive in providing a discussion about a transitional social and environmental contemporary epoch"* (Arce, personal communication).

Rural communities not only hold the potential to demonstrate new ways of producing and consuming food, they also demonstrate diverse ways of relating to one another and to nature; they demonstrate the existence of different worldviews, paths and practices and therewith challenge existing notions of modernity and 'modern institutions'. The case examples emphasize the plurality of lifestyles and reconstructions of boundaries from which challenges to social and environmental problems can be drawn once such practices are researched, analyzed and documented. Reporting, analyzing and documenting on these case examples, new paths to modernity and more respectful social and environment relations, sheds light on and provide alternatives for a blocked future.

1.3 Research objectives and research question

The first objective of this thesis is to provide a context in which the main characteristics of contemporary society is presented, focusing on the social and environmental problems related to modern industrial food production. Theories chosen for this context study deal with the social and environmental consequences or risks of modernity as well as with the institutional challenges of our future. In studying actors in reflexive communities, the assumption is made that it is against this context that they act. A second objective is to get closer to the worldviews of the rural communities by describing the experiences, daily practices and realities of the actors involved. The third objective relates to the reflexivity of

the communities. As mentioned in the introduction, reflexivity is one of the main characteristics of modernity; the acting upon a newly generated consciousness that relates to experiences from the past. Another characteristic of modernity however, are processes of individualisation. These two elements and the difficulties of institutions to govern everyday life have generated the notion that risks are important to approach social life, environmental issues and policy in contemporary society. As to explore the (re)appearance of community and the concept of reflexivity, motives, believes and practices of community members will be analyzed. In order to meet with these objectives, the central question of this research is as follows:

"How do reflexive rural communities in Brazil respond to contemporary social and environmental risks and how can their practices challenge the boundaries of modern institutions?"

This research question can be divided in the following sub-questions:

Sub-question 1
"What are the risks we face today?"
- What social problems concerning the global production of food do we face today?
- What ecological problems concerning the global production of food do we face today?
- Why are modern institutions unable to deal with these problems?

Sub-question 2
What are the worldviews of community members?
- What are the motives of origination for the community?
- What are the central socio-environmental practices?
- What norms, rules and values can be found?

Sub-question 3
"How can their practices challenges the boundaries of modern institutions?"
- Where do views on progress differ?
- Where do practices differ?
- Where do norms, rules and values differ?

1.4 Structure of report

The following chapter, chapter two, provides the reader with the methods used during the preparations, field research and processing of this report. Chapter three presents a theoretical framework that developed from an interaction and cooperation between theory and practice within my experience. The characteristics of modernity and current responses will come to light as well as appropriate and applicable means to study current responses

from which challenges can be drawn. Chapter four provides an introduction to the cases. The studied communities are presented separately as for the reader to acquaint with the different community spaces, people and practices. This setting is relevant for the fifth chapter, in which is being zoomed in on a selection of matters and reflexive practices of the communities and its members. For each case a central matter and the attributed meaning by the community and its members is elaborated upon, followed by the social and environmental production in practices and the ties that are held locally, nationally and internationally. The results of this research come to the fore in this chapter, from which conclusions are drawn and presented in chapter six, where the questions of research are recollected and reflected upon. This report concludes with a general discussion.

1.5 Boundaries of research

This research is about challenging boundaries. It is about the deconstruction of institutions and the reconsideration and reconstruction of new ones. For this research I have studied several reflexive rural communities in different spaces of Brazil. The focus is on the institutional boundaries of 'community' and individuals that are given shape to through rules and values. By forehand it was known to me that these communities were critical towards modernity and prepared to practice reconsidered views, together and on the land. As I went about my research in the field, the boundaries of the research adapted to the boundaries of the encountered communities, the individuals and their frames and institutions. During the development of this report, its boundaries interacted with the boundaries of appropriate theoretical support. The characteristics of this research boundaries suit current times and to allow negotiation and transformation. They are not solid and fixed but fluid and mobile. The case studies are not chosen to represent communities or Brazilian communities but rather to illustrate contemporary reflexive practices from the rural and (multicultural) tropics and to study their characteristics from which practical and theoretical lessons can be drawn.

2. Methods of research

For this thesis, literature as well as field research was carried out. The selected and studied literature deals with the characteristics of our current globalized society, with its modern means of food production, with modernity's socio-environmental impacts, as well as with reactions and possible solutions towards these outcomes from the field. Literature is also searched to support the empirical findings of the specific studied cases. An ethnographic field research of three and a half months was conducted based on three case studies for which I was on the move and participating in the daily life of a variety of communities.

2.1 Literature study

The literature was searched and studied before going into the field as well as during the processing and organizing of the collected data. For the theoretical framework I have focused on social theories dealing with the social and environmental consequences of modernity as on critical theories concerning the future of society. Theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have dealt with both the themes of risks as with contemporary means of dealing with these risks. The transitions of social relations in the sense of time and space go hand in hand with processes of globalization and are treated by Zygmunt Bauman within his theory of 'liquid modernity'. The rural communities of this research that are involved in the sustainable production of food can be seen as examples of reflexive modernities, as expanded on by Ulrich Beck. As to approach, study and understand the local social practices, I have focused on theory on social practice as well as on the agency of 'things'.

The variations in coping strategies of communities could also be approached with other theories, such as those on social class or social capital. A focus on social practices is however able to demonstrate the agency or power of members, their perceptions on the environment as well as the changing character of globalized institutional boundaries. Marx has contributed incredibly to our understanding of society by mapping it in classes and revealing the power relations between these, a contribution that is adhered up to today. While alienation is daily bread, his elaborations on production, power and classes have created an awareness that has infiltrated all 'layers' of society, resulting in a movement of knowledge and action that trespass the social pyramid, contest it and make it stagger. As the studied communities are a partly a result of this contestation, I have turned towards structuration views on social production and organization, in which the agency of individuals and (power) structure, the agency and arrangements of others, are mutually aiding in a continuous negotiation.

There is little doubt that access to financial means defines once practices and position, since money as a materiality is embedded in the environment we are born in. Practices around money and its negotiated meaning, its value, is globalized. Yet it remains a medium. Access to this medium as well as to the goals of this medium can be obtained or replaced by social capital.

The concept of social capital as "*features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit*" (Putnam, 1995:67), is an interesting instrument to the extent that it enables a focus on the potentials and relevance of (interpersonal) relationships and the importance of connections between members as well as the ties that communities hold with 'external' bodies, associations, movements or key individuals, ties that are beneficial to participation, inclusion and the achievement of goals. However, reducing relations between people to a network that helps to achieve goals denies its complexity as well as the core reasoning of this thesis, namely that agents are not always as free or calculated in their acts of entering into alliances. To gain better understanding of what creates value and meaning in social production, what makes people act, we can study social practices and the core materialities that these practices involve. Practice as treated in Practice theory can simultaneously be regarded and used as a theory and as a research methodology. Concluding, the literature research in relation to the field research has led me to realize the importance of the agency of the nonhuman in shaping values and social practices. The used theories are elaborated upon in the following chapter.

2.2 Ethnography

After four months of practical and theoretical preparation it was time to go into the field. During my field research I have stepped away from macro-theories and focused on real life actors with agency, on their experiences, believes and practices as well as their relations with each other and their environments. These realities are studied from an ethnographic approach. Qualitative data was collected in order to make sense of community practices, the involved reflexive knowledge of community members and the creation of meaning.

In order to experience a variety of 'new' rural realities, several types of communities have been studied. As to understand the (re)construction of institutional boundaries within these communities, participatory research was conducted surrounding the ecological production of food as well as practices that are more specific to each case. The qualitative data within these cases has been gathered through participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews, as well as many insight revealing informal conversations with the actors involved.

2.3 Case studies

In an attempt to capture and portrait the complex realities of communities, I have 'reduced' these realities by categorizing them in three cases. The first case of this research is a *neohumanist* community in which self reflection comes to the fore through meditation practices. The devoted members of this community support a philosophy that has been developed by an Indian guru in the early eighties and comes down to a love for all animate and inanimate nature. Ecological sustainability and the conscious growth of all individuals are central themes for this community.

The second case consists of four communities that are connected despite of their geographical distance. Ecology and 'energies' are central themes within these communities, to which different meanings are assigned. These communities I have labeled as 'liquid' as they are characterized by a blend of belief systems and a high mobility of people.

The third case consists of two communities of the landless rural workers movement MST (*Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra*). The majority of its members are socially marginalized ex-farmers or farmer descendents with a history in working the land for a landlord or in industry. Their practices are focused on obtaining land and political reform and include a tendency towards environmentalism.

In order to accurately study these communities, I have questioned agents on their backgrounds and believes and studied their actual practices in everyday life. Practice theory, focusing on meaning created in practice, is a helpful tool to analyze how a community comes about, is kept together or develops. Social processes however, are also influenced by the agency of 'things' around which practices are organized. While agents attach meaning to 'things', in relating to them, these things have their own affect on them as well. Therefore, I have detected a set of central materialities or 'vibrant matter' that co-create meaning and can serve as a peg to describe the key practices of the embodied knowledge of the communities and its members. Social values, means of production and consumption, technologies, and policies will this way come to the fore. These matters -respectively food, the hallucinating tea ayahuasca, and land- are furthermore able to reveal links to different times and spaces.

Cases	central matter of studied practices
1: neohumanistic community	Food
2: 'liquid' communities	Ayahuasca
3: Political communities	Land

3. Theoretical framework

Social theory can provide a useful framework to approach and explore the social organization and production of the studied cases. There are many ways to approach and study the social organization and production of society or 'communities'. Modernity's technological innovations and economic and political events however, challenge orthodox means of analysis. Considering that the socio-environmental impacts of our globalized world together with its accelerating flux of people and information opens up windows to change, some theories are more appropriate than others.

Ulrich Beck's theory of *Risk Society* (Beck, 1999) will be treated first of all. It is of value to this thesis as it is able to provide a 'macro-context' of the studied cases to which their forms of existence are strongly linked. By focusing on the currently and globalized socio-environmental risks, their manufactured characteristics and origins, Beck manages to uncover associations between social issues, environmental issues and the role of politics and technology in modernity.

As to study and analyze the performed reactions in the field I will take a temporary distance from this macro-theory and turn to a micro-approach as can be derived from *Practice Theory* (Schatzki et. al, 2001; Bourdieu; 1977; Giddens, 1984). This theory supports the view of structuration in which actors are treated as knowledgeable and capable agents that reflexively monitor their acts and (re)produce structures (Giddens, 1984). Structures or institutions -composed of norms, rules and values- are the medium and outcome of the arrangements that human agents recursively organize (Giddens, 1984). Most importantly and following Schatzki et. al, practice theory helps us to move "*beyond current problematic dualisms and ways of thinking*"(2001:1) as "*social practices govern both the meanings of arranged entities and the actions that bring arrangements about*"(2001:6), which can be seen as the "*basis of social order*" (2001:7). The study of practices thus reveals the creation of arrangements as well as the meanings attached to the arranged entities, resulting in different realities.

Nonetheless, as comes to light through Beck's theory on risks (1999), social practices do not always govern the actions that arrangements bring about. To fully reconcile motives and actions we need to be aware that in their practices, people are not merely guided by arrangements and agency of their own and that of others. In social practice, the creation of meaning and arrangements are aided by the agency of the non-human (Olsen, 2010). Realities are thus co-created by the agency of entities or things such as policies, technologies, land, food, beverage, chemicals and all other active, vibrant matter surrounding and infiltrating the agents involved. As to literally 'stuff' the voids of practice theory in an approach to study the cases, the agency of things will be emphasized. This will be done by turning to and elaborating on Jane Bennett's writings on *Vital Materialism* (Bennett, 2010). Theories on the vital character of things reveal the porous character of boundaries: between

the human and the nonhuman as well as the material and non-material. Together it flows, interacts, forms alliances and transforms.

These ideas can be linked to Bauman's concept of *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman, 2000). Bauman guides our attention to the decreasing rootedness of our society's members, their identities, values, norms and rules. But this current 'hastiness' can also be regarded as providing opportunities for new interactions, alliances, transformations and a new sense of rootedness to arise. In order to make sense of the currently arising social practices – or at least of those covered by this research- we have to understand that the accelerating nature of insecurities in the globalized world is accompanied by accelerating social flows of all kinds that bring very different realities close together, resulting in newly shared values and identities.

Once the agency of humans as well non-humans is taken into consideration, motivations and meanings are derived from practices and regarded as interacting matter. This will demonstrate that realities develop in interaction with the material surroundings that shape experiences. It also shows that despite the different surrounding matter, the different practices and different experiences, the practices are in all cases reflexive to modernity. This turn us towards the conceptualization of *Reflexive Modernization* and *Reflexive Modernities* (Beck et. al, 1994). Reflexive modernization is intrinsic to a Risk Society as it leaves individuals in all layers of society no other choice but to reconsider modernity and adjust its values, tools and practices (Beck et al., 1994). The communities covered by this research experiment with adjusted knowledge and can thus be regarded reflexive modernities.

Their practiced knowledge is new in the sense that it embodies a collective reconsideration of modernity with regard to the impacts on the environment and its people. This leads to the development of new values which are dynamic experiences influenced by the human and the nonhuman. These theories will now be elaborated upon and recapped to facilitate further reading.

3.1 Risk society

Several scholars have demonstrated with their work that a focus on risks enables us to reveal the current socio-environmental state of the world and its profound relations to modernity (Beck, 2000; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Giddens 1999; Giddens and Pierson 1998; Lash, Szerszynski; and Wynne 1996). They remark an increase in risks, a transformation of their nature, an inability to deal with them using old tools as well as an increased pervasiveness of these risks. Either through direct experience or through (globalized) flows of information we are becoming increasingly confronted with these risks and aware of their origins.

Beck's work is exclusive as it does not subside in enduring discussions on conceptualizations. It goes beyond discussing its own discipline by acknowledging the critical state of society and focusing on social and environmental change. Most importantly

his concept of risk society *"combines what once was mutually exclusive –society and nature, social sciences and material sciences, the discursive construction of risk and the materiality of threats"* (Beck, 1999:4). He is concerned with identifying the new while at the same time his endeavours uncover the involved mechanisms of change. By mapping the contemporary interlinked social (environmental, political, economic and technological) developments as he does, a space arises in which human agency continues to play a role, yet a very new and revised one as we are channelled to face the challenges and reconsider future institutions. As Beck's analytical interpretations and his focus on a friendlier future hold line with the aims of this thesis, Beck's notions of risks and 'Risk Society' will be concentrated upon

Following Beck (1999), '*Risk Society*' refers to the organization of a society that is increasingly characterized by the hazards and insecurities brought about by modernization: *"New insecurities are infiltrating the secure welfare state and erupting there. These may involve the loss of formerly secure benefits, threats to health or life itself from toxins, criminality and violence, or the loss of such certainties as the faith in progress, science and experts"* (Beck, 1997: 12). Many of the risks to which modern society is exposed to, such as pollution, health issues and violence are 'manufactured risks' and the results of processes of modernization. He centrally discusses the failure of modern industrial society to manage or 'control' the risks it has shaped, and the challenges this implies for the future. Concentrating on the role of risks enables him to demonstrate that gradually we have moved from industrial towards a new type of society: "Risk Society" (Beck,1999). Throughout the years, society has shaped a system of institutions and regulations for the distribution of welfare and growth, but has not managed to deal with the unintended consequences and risks it has brought about, issues that are coming to the fore for a growing number of people. The role of wealth distribution in social conflicts seems to be making space for conflicts that arise from the distribution of risks and their accompanied issues of responsibility, accountability and decision-making (Beck, 1999). The problem in approach is that these risks are not incidental. Rather, Beck argues, they are intrinsic to, legitimized and made possible by the organization of modern institutions. He emphasises that we should not expect that this type of society, with its focus on economic growth, the relative redistribution of wealth and continuously increasing consumption can subsist (Beck, 1997).

Processes of globalization have increased, accelerated and expanded connections of all kinds. Global flows of goods and services, technologies, information, policies, money and people have resulted in an increase of risks as well as an increase in the perception of these risks. Obviously, risks have always been present, but today peculiar dimensions can be found added. Where risks used to be accidental, they now emerge so frequently that they have become almost normal, as a part of the deal. Risks are increasingly human-induced -as they are linked to technological innovations and policies- and where they used to be relatively easy to grasp in terms of cause, prevention, responsibility and accountability, they are now much more complex, universal (crossing borders) and have prolonged and long-term effects.

It has become a matter of 'organized irresponsibility' (Beck, 2008). The increasing difficulty for state institutions to manage risks has also created a space for 'sub-politics', "*the inquiry into the structure-changing practice of modernity*" (Beck, 1997: 103) that he considers as a signal that social, political and administrative institutions are in need for unconventional reform.

The uncomfortable impacts of modernity can be experienced by a growing group of people and we are gradually becoming more aware of faraway threats due to improved communication technologies. Due to its manufactured and global characteristics, we have demonstrated an incapability in dealing with them. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 for example, resulted in the international spread of radioactive material, toxics in Chinese toys end up in the mouths of American babies, America's share to greenhouse emissions floods an island in the pacific, leaked oil and global plastic waste ends up in 'nobodies' oceans and chemical industrial waste ends up in the ecological cycle of our planet. When it comes to food and its means of production, we see that technological innovations as shaped by scientists and adopted in policies, under the pressures of the global market and 'empires' (van der Ploeg, 2010) lead to an increase in risks for the wellbeing of people and other living organisms. With regard to the contamination of food, the BSE affaire is an often used example as it enables us to reveal the complexity of involved processes in the realization of risks and show the difficulties in resolving or reducing them.

The globalized and interdependent character of these risks makes it very hard for modern institutions to detect responsibility, take accountability and handle adequately. Several attempts, of which the international climate agreements are an example, have up to today not proofed to be much effective. In their exploration of solutions, producers, consumers, activists, politicians and scientists more often than not assign the responsibility to act to 'the other'.

3.2 Practice Theory

To approach and study communities experimenting with solutions, a focus on social practices is essential. "*Legions of social thinkers have treated human action as both constitutively and causally crucial to social and historical affairs*", write Schatzki et. al (2007:97). A focus on practices reveals how realities are (re)created. Following *Practice Theory*, it are social practices that bring about arrangements and govern the meaning attached to arranged entities (Schatzki et. al, 2001). The social structure is an interactive process in which we *act* and *react* (Giddens, 1984). Behavior might be strongly governed as well as guided by ones social surroundings and arranged entities, yet we add to these and have the option to mutually change our thinking and behavior.

When, for example, a deficiency occurs, we are alarmed to change our routinized behavior. But in running through the alternatives, we are not completely free. Although it is us that run through the options, we will not manage to run through all the options. The options we have and see are preselected. They are predefined by ones experiences as well as by the present state of once surrounding environment. The relationship between individual and society is a classical as well as contemporary debate in sociology (Giddens, 1991). The extent to which we are the pilots of our destinies, capable to construct our own lives, and what is defining this extent within society is a debate on social organization dealing with freedom and control, autonomy and power or agency and structure. Practice Theory supports the idea of structuration, that emphasizes the interactions between agency and structure (Giddens, 1984).

Once a choice is made (rationally and/or emotionally), practice is ought to follow. People act towards things and people on the basis of the meaning these things or people have to them (Blumer according to Calhoun, 2007:30). By studying social practices, we study the construction of meaning and are enabled to approach the extent to which we actually are free agents. The studied cases consist of people that experienced in different ways the deficiencies of modernity. Consequently, these people mobilized the resources available to them in order to practice their reconsidered and polished views on life. The work of practice theorists such as Bourdieu, Giddens and Schatzki is helpful to approach the reactions of the studied communities. A focus on practice from the view of structuration reveals the creation of meaning, new knowledge and therewith realities.

3.3 Vital materialism, the force of stuff

Within social practice, the creation of meaning is also shaped by the non-human. The theory of vital materialism comes down to accentuating that 'things' or non-humans have agency. They can act. The relevance of this idea relates to contemporary social production and organization, on the one hand as it adds to the understandings of human (un)free will and on the other hand, as it is able to transform our fragmented modes of perception and thinking. The current social, political and ecological conditions -which are all but isolated from one another- as well as many social theories seem to have developed from an anthropocentric thinking and from our perception of the surroundings as enclosed entities that we can arrange fully to our wishes. In her book 'Vibrant matter', Jane Bennett (2010) illuminates the changing and membrane-like character of boundaries of any kind, facilitating perceptions and modes of thinking more in terms of associations, assemblages or alliances. She refers to Spinoza who already argued that it is intrinsic to bodies ('stuff', things, people) to be susceptible to infusion, invasion or collaboration by or with other bodies. She also argues that in our perception of things we are often focused on how we can use them (how to control them) and are therefore not susceptible to or aware of its (inherent?) powers.

Following Latour, non-humans are *"full-fledged actors in our collective"* (2009:156). All entities or human and non-human 'actants' are interconnected and their meaning results from our experience of the interactions.

Bennett argues that things have agency as we are attracted by them and they have the ability to transform. Things can 'call us'. The way they do relates strongly to our memories, our personal experience of attached meaning. The 'thing', acting upon all our senses, is able to evoke positive feelings of recognition or comfort. Many of us are attracted by money for example, as a result of the meaning or value we have attached to it. This value has become embedded in 'the thing' insofar as it strongly influences our thoughts and acts. In associating -with us, within us or with one another- things have the power to transform. Food influences our bodily conditions, moods and therewith our acts, as do for example bacteria, chemicals, policies and technologies. Bennett (2010) elaborates on Spinoza's work by supporting his reasoning that every body or entity ('things' as well as humans) possesses a certain drive to pursue alliances with other bodies that enhance its vitality or power. She aims to *"emphasize the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces (operating in nature, in the human body, and in human artifacts) in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought"* (Bennett, 2010:xvi). *"We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism"*, she continues, *"-the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature- to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world"* (Bennett, 2010:xvi). This can *"catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations"* (Bennett, 2010:99). This attempt holds a great potential to overcome the previous and currently harming effects of approaching humans either as mere passive subordinates to a (cultural, religious, economic or political) structure, or as the sole possessors of agency that are (like gods) in complete control of the world. It can furthermore help to explain why people act as they do by bringing 'things' to the fore and the human and its agency away from the center.

With regard to this thesis, these ideas enable an understanding of the continuously contested boundaries of 'a community' and the relations this holds to vital matter such as food, land, politics and technologies. By recognizing the vitality of things, our relations to these change, impacting our thoughts, acts and realities. Different meanings can be ascribed to the vitality of things. It is the meaning attached to something, combined with the vitality of that something that aids ones experience in practice.

What this theory shows is that everything is interacting, forming and transforming matter. Accelerations interactions of all kinds transform values, norms, rules and practices. With these interactions, boundaries gain a new texture. This leads to Bauman's theory on *Liquid modernity* (2000).

3.4 Liquid modernity

Considering the high mobility of people and information in the current globalized world, we can benefit from a new approach to interpret the many aspects of culture and knowledge that can be found blended in society. Interactions are increasingly frequent, diverse and sometimes hasty, turning identities and lifestyles to be less static and predictable.

Bauman uses this concept to analyze the present conditions of the world and its unpredictable, hasty and fluid character that ask from individuals to be flexible and continuously adapt their strategies to the uncertainties of life. People are trying new ways to deal with or resolve the issues that are produced by global development. Bauman (2007:1) reasons that we have moved from a 'solid' to a 'liquid' stage of modernity described as "*a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior) can no longer (and are not expected to) keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set*". In Liquid modernity, identity never acquires a final shape. He states that most of us are in a position in which we are responsible for creating our own identity, since this identity is not determined for us anymore. Communities are therefore no longer rooted. Where belonging to community used to be addressed in terms of roots, it is now in terms of networks and anchors that we throw out wherever we find ourselves (Bauman, 2007).

An important question that remains is whether we can speak of a co-existence of rooted and network societies or a general shift from rooted to network society, as the degree and character of this hastiness or liquidity is still varying across places and (groups of) individuals. As is repeatedly stressed by Bauman, the shift from a solid to a liquid modernity and the insecurity that this shift brings along, is characterized by "*ignorance, powerlessness and humiliation*" (Volkskrant, February 4th) and can be experienced by many as confusing, overwhelming and threatening. Subsequently, such experiences can result in defensive behaviour, individualization and radicalization (of tradition and religion) in order to protect one's identity, culture or country (Bauman, 2007). In a brighter daylight, the flexibility, adaptability and creativity that is triggered by current day insecurities, enable people to open up in the search for new ways and new ideas. Sense of belonging and identity are than no longer bound to properties, a job, a place, religion or 'culture' and the 'structures that limit options' therewith fade away. This openness adding to the accelerating (global) social interactions are able to amplify our perception of choices. Processes involving "*often deeply gratifying and enjoyable daily encounters with the humanity hiding behind the frightening unfamiliar scenic masks of different and mutually alien races, nationalities, gods and liturgies*" (Bauman, 2007:93), seem most able to facilitate a deconstruction of the protective walls between 'us and them' (Bauman, 2007) and even to dissolve the socially constructed boundaries between us and our natural surroundings. Contemporary communities composed of people from very

different places, cultures or religions, are able to demonstrate this. On the one hand, the negotiated boundaries of the community might be blurry and highly dynamic, in line with a liquid modernity. On the other hand, there is a certain rootedness, a sense of belonging, one that follows from a shared experience of discontent and a shared fate or 'considered' choice. The content of this consideration is ambiguous. Beck would regard this choice rather as a lack of other options, as a reflex to modernity. Irrespective of the character of such choice, we could be referring to these communities as **reflexive modernities**.

3.5 Reflexive Modernities

Reflexive Modernization forms part of a 'Risk society' and originated from the acknowledgement that sociological theory and methods needed an update in order to understand the present, with eyes on the future. A new, constructive paradigm was needed as to approach the realization of society's demands that marked the shift to what Beck named 'second modernity'. Reflexive modernity is characterized by a "*re-subjectivization of space*" (MacKian, 2004:615). It is reactive on the past and thus suggests again a transition to something new:

> "*It is time to inquire into the beginning which is hidden in every end*", Beck writes. And "*the perspective of reflexive modernization connects both inquiries; the question of what is breaking up is confronted by the question of what is coming into being, the question of the contours, principles and prospects of a second, non-linear, global modernity in a 'cosmopolitan intention' (Kant)*" (1997:11). "*We must learn to see that the fatalisms that dominate our thinking are antiquated, that they cannot stand up to the test of a decisive self- confrontation of modernity*", Beck continues (1997:15).

Beck's historical divisions -feudal traditionalism, first modernity, second modernity and reflexive modernity- although seeming somewhat artificial and inert, can help us to see how generations reflect on social, environmental and political experiences from the past and are able to provide us with some of today's relevant characteristics.

Following Beck (1997), the 'erosion of industrial modernity' is succeeded by and at the same time the generator of 'reflexive modernization'. "*The questioning of industrial modernity has for some time no longer been limited to the alarms from the environmental crises; it is beginning to gnaw at almost all ordering models of society*" (:12). As the pressures of modernity are increasing, rural actors are seeking new solutions beyond the governmental- private paradigm (Hess, 2008). Participatory self-governance, respect for nature and community-solidarity are examples of such reactions (Hess, 2008). These are non-modern responses to modern problems wherein people themselves create opportunities from how they perceive the world around them and negotiate the constrains of the outside world. Diversity exists in the

development of these reactions which is partly linked to the access that actors have to mobilize certain resources. The development of responses relies on the different backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, values and means possessed by the actors involved. Beck and Grande (2010:423) state that "*new imagined cosmopolitical communities arise within the discursive spaces of global risks*". The same goes up for social movements, yet they might perceive these risks differently and have different means available to cope with them. 'Methodological cosmopolitanism' (Beck and Grande, 2010) takes the varieties of modernity and their global interdependencies as a starting point for theoretical reflection and empirical research and includes the others' experiences and perspectives on modernization. This is why it is relevant to explore the coping strategies of different communities and link them with their social backgrounds. "*Let us call the autonomous, undesired, and unseen, transition from industrial to risk society reflexivity (to differentiate it from and contrast it with reflection). Then 'reflexive modernisation' means self-confrontation with the effects of risk society that cannot be dealt with and assimilated in the system of industrial society*", Beck writes (Beck et al., 1994:6.). This new type of modernity thus has to solve the human-constructed problems which have resulted from the development of industrial society. The challenge for communities (whether acting out of reflex or reflecting) is to discover how the risks produced by modernity can be "*prevented, minimized, dramatized, or channeled*" (Beck, 1992:19). "*Reflexive modernization*", Beck argues, "*is the attempt to regain a voice and thus the ability to act, the attempt to regain reality in view of developments that are the consequences of the successes of modernization*" (1997:15) and "t*he cultures of the world are now able for the first time to open themselves to the global dialogue. A global exchange is necessary on what 'development' can and should mean for the future* " (1997:16). And a global exchange is occurring, recreating institutional boundaries and realities.

Beck's focus on the erosion of traditional institutions and the arising opportunities is relevant to this thesis as we can see that a new values develop within the studied communities. By constructing new networks of ideas and ideologies, new institutions develop that lay bare characteristics for us to study. "*Late modernity*", Lash and Urry write, *"not only brings commodification and the domination of techno-scientific instrumental rationality, but also opens up possibilities for individuals to reflect critically on these changes and their social conditions of existence, and hence potentially to change them*" (1994: 32).

3.6 Summary

Modernity, to be understood as the social relations and institutions brought about in the scene of a globalized neo-liberal development program, is increasingly characterized by the risks it simultaneously brings about and is plagued by. Conditions have run out of control. Individual responses to the rise of insecurities demonstrate an increase in associational mobility. Aside from the social discomfort that this 'liquid modernity' engenders, accelerating social interactions also provide opportunities for different worlds of ideas and

practices to meet and negotiate solutions for the flaws of modernity. Negotiations reflect on 'old' practices, regenerating knowledge, meaning and practices. The ensuing 'reflexive modernities' -or in respect to the studied cases 'communities'- and their boundaries can be studied by looking at the nature of associations between people and 'things' in practices.

4. Encountering space, people and practices.

The nature of associations between people and things is studied through an exploration of the central practices of community members around specific matter. The content of relations that comes to the fore reveals members' views, uniqueness in social positioning and the characteristics of social and physical boundaries from which challenges to modernity can be drawn. The next chapter will treat the central practices, matters and views of the community members in closer detail. First, a presentation of each site of research will be provided. Since the researcher is simultaneously its research tool and a social being, the following descriptions are personal. An account on the moments of encounter serves in painting an image of all three cases and provide the reader with a useful context for the next chapters. Technology mediated as well as physical encounters with the research site's spaces, the people and their practices are included. The used names for people and places are fictitious.

4.1 Neohumanist community

The first community I arrived in is located in a rural area about fifty kilometers from the political capital Brasilia. Back home I had tried to invoke an impression of where I would end up by using Google images and Google earth. These impressions were quite different to those perceived at the moment of arrival. My first encounter was with Brahbra, a yogic nun and central figure running a neohumanist *fazenda* (farm) and development project with the help of other followers of a neohumanist philosophy, students of the environment and national and international volunteers. Another central figure at this site – and a continuously returning figure during the rest of my research- was Ali, who was often around and helping out. Brahbra and I had been mailing back and forth frequently in the three months previous to us meeting in person. I had found her place on a list of organic farms for volunteers, on the internet. After a first correspondence it came out that she was Dutch and soon after she wrote me that she had followed courses on architectural design for a while in Wageningen.

A peaceful smile was on her youthful face when I came walking through the gates with my luggage. There was no way we could have missed each other. She was tall and dressed in a stark orange cape like I had imagined and I had been lacking sunshine for a while and was just too blond to be swallowed up by the scene. While we embraced each other, Brahbra welcomed me in Dutch with an extraordinary accent. Exited and encouraged by the tropical ambient and ready for this new adventure, I spoke some words in Portuguese to her, most probably with an even stranger accent. While walking ourselves and my bags to her 'robust' white van, I became aware of the amount of attention she must have been receiving during her years in Brazil. "*In Holland people stare at you and might turn their heads, here people are really curious and few manage to hide it. They just ask you who you are*", she said short after a men had

approached to ask her what was behind her exceptionally appearance. For these genuine and easy attitudes among many other things, I would come to love Brazil. The city landscape seemed contrastingly tight.

On our way to the farm we made a pit stop at a vegetarian restaurant and meditation center where no one would ask Brahbra who or what she was. After taking a rest on a yoga mat in a big, unfamiliarly smelling room with pictures of an unfamiliar man in lotus position on the wall, I was introduced to other followers of the neohumanist philosophy. They carried spiritual names. Among them was Joe, a very socially engaged, generous and friendly friend of Brahbra. Joe gave me an alternative introduction to Brazilian politics while showing me around the city. Later on I was introduced me to 'the real Brazil', where I would find myself among his family in one of Brazilia's satellite cities. A big pile of that year's first corn-yield was to be processed into sweet and salty puree packaged in corn leaves. It was a special day. Lots of members of his family had gathered to prepare and eat *pamonha*, a traditional Brazilian corn dish. Only the next day I would be arriving at the site of my first case to study, a little farm with big plans and a dusty forty minutes ride from the capital.

"*Namaskar*", I was greeted by a man with long dark hair and a beard that was surrounded by other men with long dark hair and beards. Some were wearing orange t-shirts and I recognized the symbols on the medallions they were wearing on chest-height that I had seen in the mediation center of the restaurant. It showed a star, a rising/dawning sun, and a swastika. As I had no instant idea on how to react on this unusual salute, I gave the men a dull smile and stretched my arm to shake theirs. For an image of the site, imagine turbulent and blue skies above a muddy red road in 'the rural'. The road leads to a modest second-hand house with a veranda, surrounded by green hills with purple trees and waterfalls in the distance. This is the '*cerrado*', Brazilian tropical savannah. During my stay, the days were hot with abrupt sky transformations followed by impressive showers, while it would cool down at night. During the evening meditations, foreigners with reddish cheeks would start sneezing. But this was summer and rain season. The winters are less hot and so dry that fires are not exceptional. From the little house with the veranda went a path down to a second small house that is being used by visitors. These two houses are surrounded by lots of plants, flowery trees and fruit trees, providing two types of tangerine, oranges, six types of mangos, three types of avocado, jocote, guava, banana, plum, pomegranate, black mulberry and lemon. Behind the first house lies a mandala-shaped garden with vegetables and herbs waiting to be harvested at meal preparation time or tea time. All this covers only two hectares of a total of thirty-seven. Seventeen hectares lie in a protected area while the rest is grassland, which for the time being is rented out pasture land, decorated with a bunch of curious cows and horses.

Apart from a small number of volunteers and the more frequent visitors of the farm - followers of this neohumanist philosophy- around twenty people had gathered on the farm

for a ten days ecological camp to participate in workshops on bio-construction, agro-forestry, composting, organic fertilizers, permaculture, vegetarian cooking, yoga, meditation and other neohumanist themes and rituals. Some had traveled great distance for the camp. In between the mango trees, a big tent was constructed where yoga, the singing of mantra's and meditation took place and extraordinary food was shared three times a day. For a minority of the visitors, the ritual element of the camp had come as a surprise. For me as a researcher it had not. Yet, I had still to figure out how to position myself in this setting. As these practices were new to me, theories popped up to interpret what I was assisting. In the context of this ecological camp however, the rituals didn't seem to fit any. Was there social cohesion of any kind? It wasn't exactly a class and following Brahbra, these rituals form part of a philosophy, not a religion.

The daily program was tight and starting early. At 5am, '*paincajanya*' is scheduled, early morning meditation. "*At the time of doing paincajanya the mind becomes filled with spontaneous joy*" their guru has stated. At six thirty in the morning however, time for *ásanas* or yoga class, my mind is still dreaming and my body needs a bit more time to get used to the new surroundings as well as to my rock-hard mattress. *Desjejum*, breakfast, was not to be missed. At seven thirty, everyone would gather on the floor of the big tent to share loads of fruits, grains, cheese, marmalade, home-made yogurt and freshly baked brown bread. A share of the fruits and vegetables came from the kitchen garden and from the trees and plants around the house. Another share was coming from a neighboring farm and eco-village carrying the same name and owner as the vegetarian restaurant and meditation center in the capital. Additional foodstuffs such as grains were bought in the supermarket. After breakfast we would clean and prepare for *Karma yoga*, labor. Especially for this camp week, karma yoga was transformed into workshops. From nine am to twelve thirty an agroforestry student, follower of the neohumanist philosophy and friend of Brahbra, was leading a workshop on agro-ecology. The campers and volunteers would gather around him as he started a chat on soil characteristics and nutrient cycles.

After planting some seeds and seedlings in the right combinations along the borders of a basin that was to moisture the descending land, enriching the soil with manure and minerals and covering this up with leaves and branches, it was time for the second collective meditation of the day. Back in the big tent, the yoga-mats were this time arranged in front of a little altar. The altar was decorated with flowers and in between the flowers was a framed picture of the man in lotus position. Brahbra, again in orange garment, was standing faced towards her guru while tuning her guitar. Barefooted people gently started walking in and took place on the thin rubber mats behind Brahbra. Eagerly searching around for the rules, I saw people sitting down and others getting back on their feet. Some had their eyes closed. Brahbra started playing her guitar and put in a hymn. The words were easy and her singing was very tuned. Soon everyone was on their feet and participating, stepping from side to side, "*to stimulates a certain part of the brain and facilitate a meditative mode*", Brahbra explained.

Lilian, a volunteer from Denmark, smiled at me emphatically while a mantra with as lyrics *Baba nam kevalam*, that comes down to 'all is love' in Sanskrit, was repeated for fifteen to twenty minutes. During this time people would hold their palms together in front of their chests or raise their hands up to the sky until Brahbra stopped playing her guitar and sat down. Everyone now sat down in lotus position and for the next thirty minutes there would be silence. From time to time I could see Brahbra nodding as if she was falling asleep. Half an hour later she starts to sing softly, a different hymn, and the others fall in. The singing continues softly and people pretend to give and receive something – a lotus flower- while bending over to the ground and getting back in position. When meditation is concluded people start to face to each unwind and smiling. Brahbra hands a little book to a person from the group. The book is to be opened randomly after which a short message is read out loud. The message triggered few reactions this time, perhaps because lunchtime had come.

Lunchtime brings carefully prepared *sattvic* or yogic food. This means lots of Indian spiced vegetables, leaves, lentils and pastries. It also means the absence of any meat, eggs, mushrooms, onion and garlic. After Lunch there is about an hour of rest before karma yoga continues. Around seven in the evening people take a shower -some following specific instructions- and get ready for evening meditation that is followed by dinner. For dinner there is what has remained from lunch, soup, bread and often popcorn. During the camp however, preparations received some extra attention. After dinner little energy is left and people talk, make some music and go to sleep to wake up the next day as early as the day before.

Aside from meditation, the followers of the neohumanist philosophy share plenty of other customs and rituals. Fundamental guidelines, known as *the sixteen points*, are followed for practices such as eating, washing and interacting with one another as well as with nature. In the following chapter, the focus of this case will be on food. Meaning attributed to food as accentuated by the community members in practices that surround its production and consumption, will be elaborated upon as o reveal the community's views, characteristics and networks of knowledge.

Photo page case one

4.1 Encountering place, people and practices

Picture 4.1.1: "fazenda" neohumanist community project (by Ceacilia Blinkenberg)

Picture 4.1.2: Meditation practices

4.2 Liquid communities

This second case consists of four communities that are connected despite of their geographical distance. They share some significant characteristics. The first of these communities lies in the state of Goiás and is closely connected to surrounding communities. What binds the members of each community is defined in the interactions with the space and people. Shared ideas can be found practiced in various rituals. Essentially in the first community of this case, such practices are influenced and guided by the intake of Ayahuasca, an indigenous tea with hallucinating, mind altering and therapeutic effects. The other three communities are situated in Bahia. They are connected to one another and the communities in Goiás through interactions: visits, visitors, the internet and large gatherings such as rainbow gatherings, the National Meeting of Alternative Communities (ENCA) and the International Festival of Alternative Communities (FICA). Due to the fluid character of its social and physical boundaries -a mixture of belief systems, flexible norms and rules and the high mobility of its members- and a shared affection for nature, these communities will be approached as one case in the following chapters. A separate introduction to these communities however, serves in respect to their uniqueness.

4.2.1 Goiás

I arrived in Goiás by car from Brasilia with Ali, his son Chris and Phill, a neohumanist monk from the Philippines and frequent visitor of the previous farm. Now they were on a mission to introduce me to other communities, reunite with friends and initiate some new members on the way. The ecological tourism in the municipalities' centre was what first caught my eye. 'Hippies' were all around. 'Is this a place where I should be doing research?' I wondered. In Brazil and around the world, this place has gained popularity for its ecological and mystical character and attracts people interested in mind altering practices and natural therapies. The scene -with its green mountains and valleys, waterfalls and a constantly lightning and starry sky during the nights- suit such practices well. Many different mystical, philosophical and religious groups are living in this area, that by some is called 'the capital of the third millennium'.

The first people I met when we arrived were Tom and Heather and their little son Pie. We were guided through a beautiful garden to a wonderful house with an amazing view over the valley. 'Paradise', I thought. And then; 'how do they make living?'. After being introduced to them by their close friend Ali, I explained what I had come for and asked Heather what she was doing in her daily life. Her facial expression immediately made me think it could well have been too soon for such a question. Heather was wearing dungarees and she looked calm and much younger as I later found out she was. She sniffed her nose, looked at me and gave me a smile as if she was thinking on how to properly answer me. '*There's no energy to work. Friends come to visit us all the time. I can't work because they bring a*

different energy with them', she said. *'Once there's less people I will go to work again'*. Only later I would come to realize what she meant. I would come to understand that Heather was in fact a doctor that went back to work when the visiting friends had gone, when she found the need and energy to do so.

Tom took the lead in walking us to the place where we would be staying. His long dark hair and beard decorated a youthful and energetic face and white linen clothes loosely fitted his skinny body. We arrived at the most exciting place to stay that I had ever seen. In front of me appeared a big circle-shaped building, entirely constructed from trees. The roof was made out of palm-leaves and the building was infiltrated and surrounded by colorful vegetation. Inside, on one side of the circle, there were some toilets, communal showers and a lookout. At the other half was the communal kitchen with a wood oven and two hammocks. My eyes wandered off to a surplus of mango´s in bowls and to blinking *crystals* lying clustered around the place. Around fifteen years ago, the hills on which this construction is located, used to carry a community project of thirty people. They had all bought a share of land, but no private areas were defined. Inspired by the indigenous 'Ianomame', one of the residents - a man from African descendants that has been living in Brazil for many years- constructed this space. After some confusion and misunderstandings, this man had left to Brasilia. He had two more houses in this area, of which one is now Heather's. Today, some of the ten remaining proprietors are slowly reappearing. Some of them say they want to construct new houses in case something happens to the planet. Others want to sell their share. At the moment of writing, Heather's house is rented out and Tom and her are temporarily living separately in the center.

The stairs led us to the first floor where beds had been prepared. The next morning, the first floor appeared to be crowded. People were sleeping head to toe on the wooden flat of the open building. Gathered in the kitchen for the first time that day, there was chaos. Who is who and arrived when? I was not the only one with that question on my mind. Additional questions that might have been exclusively on my mind were 'who is eating what' and 'where's mom'. It did not seem to matter, the day was greeted with a song. Ali's songs were known in the neohumanist community and they were known over here, as songs were exchanged during festivals. It took me two days to figure out that we were with thirteen. Occasionally we were with less or more. There was a high dynamic of people that came looking for themselves, for old friends or a holiday. The majority of the visitors were friends of friends of Tom and Heather that had recommended the place. The visitors had been there for days, weeks or months. A few had come for a special occasion; the festival of traditional medicine. A week long, rituals were held that attracting visitors from all around the world. The rituals were guided by 'popular' shamans and religious leaders from different areas of the continent and included herbs, cacti, tea and frog poison. These activities explained the frequent use of the word *energy* in people's speech. This energy had all to do with the location I was told, and specifically with the crystal layer we were on.

On a special day a different man came to complain. We should not have taken all that fruit from his fruit forest. *'When you take, you give something back'* he said. Someone of the community told me later on that this man was taking care of a proprietors' land, coming with a royal house. The fruit-forest would have been an attempt of a representative of the coca-cola company to add the sustainability component to its image. Nonetheless, I could only agree with what this man was saying. When you take, you give something back. Or at least remove the trace of peels. The energy to give back and plant had however yet to come. At the moment it seemed time to 'love and enjoy'. The visitors' hastiness makes it hard for norms and rules that some were trying to implement to nest and besides this, there are other priorities. *'Trabalhar e fazer cura'* for example, to work and cure. This work and cure would take place in rituals during which Ayahuasca is collectively drunk by visitors, locals and children alike, practices that will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

4.2.2 Cacao farm Bahia

This community is registered as an NGO, that I had also come across on the list of organic farms on the web. This NGO is a "*Brazilian Registered Association that functions as a network of people from diverse backgrounds who are united in their passion to explore sustainable ways of living, being, creating, working, learning and travelling*", I could read on their blog while still at home. The mix of international friends, the announcement of a permaculture project and a picture of their cacao plantation moved me to contact this farm some months in advance to my departure. "*Thanks for your interest in wanting to share the nourishing experiences of this beautiful land with us*", I was welcomed. Their email contained an update on the activities, things for me to take into account and directions to reach the place. Their activities were nicely briefed with the words "*we are building our knowledge of the land*" and I was provided with an account on the general experience: This place is a "*micro-cosmos of the greater issues in the world. There are wonders and wobbles, but so far everyone has left with a personal and profound enrichment in one way or another*". "*We have few luxuries in the modern sense*", I was warned subsequently in the mail. The absent "luxuries" were listed: no tap water, no electricity, no phone, no TV, no McDonalds, no cleaners, no beds, no flushing toilet, no fridge and no pharmacy.

It was a an exciting moment when eventually got out of the bus on a sandy road hosting around 30 families at its vivid verges. Soon it came out that things were not to go as planned. The residents of the farm had left only some days before, a young man came to tell in Bahian dialect. I was already imagining the adventurous canoe ride it would take me to cross the impressive river, the *Rio das Contas*. Some kids had gathered behind the man and it appeared that this man was taking care of the farm's cacao-plantations and I was in fact standing in his backyard. Some things had preceded, he told me. He did not know when the owners would be back. My bus however, had already disappeared and the next one would arrive only the next morning. At that moment a generously smiling lady approached. "*I saw you coming out*

of the bus and assumed you were to visit the farm" she said and proposed me to stay in her own house until people would be returning. It wouldn't take long, she thought. And so it happened that I got to know Diana, her seven year old son, her parents and the rest of her cheerful family and friends in this tiny town. Everyone seemed to love Diana. One night we would all gather outside at the bar and restaurant of her cousin to chat and exchange ideas in Bahian style, *'botar papo'* and *'trocar ideas'*. Their gratitude had moved me. It became clear how much these people were appreciating their lives, one another and even the visitors, right from this spot. City live was crazy, they had heard it many times. Here they were away from pressures such as busy jobs, pollution and violence. Laughs were shared and memories of a rainbow gathering -organized on the farm the previous year - were brought up. They would never forget the man playing violin on a one-wheeled bike. Diana's house had a little bar as well and was constructed just in front of her parents' house. For her parents –as for most others- the river is a vital source. On daily basis, fresh fish and shrimps (*curuca, acari, calambão, camarão* and *pitú*) would be caught. Women would walk back and forth to the river carrying heaps of clothes on their heads and in the river I would find them at the rocks, discussing their lives while washing their clothes with coconut soap.

After some days, three of the residents arrived and explained me what had happened. They had been with many, working and living cheerfully and peacefully on the farm, when out of the blue they were assaulted by two men wearing forage-caps and guns. The shock of this event had been so big, that everyone had left the farm. Nothing like this had ever happened here before. A British resident now came to pick up some things. He and his Brazilian girlfriend had been there when it all happened. As they were expecting a baby, they had decided to calm down and prepare for the 'natural birth' of their child at a new site, an eco-village that I would get to visit next. A Frenchman, Diana's boyfriend, had come back to stay and carry on with the projects, but was to head off to a rainbow-gathering in Argentina within a few days. James, a worldly Frenchman with big dreams and a strong pillar of the project, was in great confusion about all that had occurred.

Even in paradise there is a lot of work to do and issues to confront. Extremely good times had been alternated with some hard ones. Some issues had preceded the initiation of the project. In the nineties, Bahia's cacao-belt had been plagued by a fungal disease (locally referred to as *'vassoura da bruxa'*, witch broom) leading to failed harvest and bringing the local producers into trouble. The government had encouraged the owners of cacao-plantations to take a loan and invest in resistant cacao grafting material. When this did not help to restore the production, many cacao producers ran into debts and had to leave their farms and sell the land to the bank. The international friends of this farm had bought the land with debts from the former owner -that had not invested in the land- and this way got enrolled in a court case. They were threatened to lose all if they wouldn't pay part of the debt promptly. After paying this share, the case could continue. Meanwhile, interest had increased. Massive energy was collected to raise the needed amount and with success. They

raised the money in time. But then the bank had found something new, preventing the debt from being relieved. Meanwhile, more trouble came to the front. Plans to construct a dam on exactly this 'property' that was having administrative issues. *"We heard that you are having troubles with your administration, maybe we can help"*, the employees of a Portuguese hydro-electric company, with an office in Minas Gerais, came to tell. During my stay they were already measuring around. The farm residents as well as the other villagers were worried. They would probably want the land, and land would be flooded. James was holding a flyer of the company's dam project in his hands. Everything looked perfect: '*sustainable and good for all*', it said. He had become very skeptic and suspicious. Typically, fear was being created in order to ease the way for profitable plans. To him, it was all linked. The registration-issues, the debts, the dam and now the assault. Many impacting things were occurring at the same time while he had many big plans ahead, one of which is now becoming reality: the development of a Slow-cargo movement, in cooperation with the Slow food movement. A sailing ship will cross the Atlantic, bringing organic beer from Devon to France, olive oil from Spain to Brazil, pick up cacao from the farm, continue to the Caribbean to pick up rum and then head back to England for the festival season. While he was now to head off to the UK for a while, Diana and her French boyfriend would soon pick up the activities on the farm again. As a result of all that had occurred, the farm was now left in little activity. The more and less permanent residents had all scattered to other communities, countries and places. Diana accompanied me to visit the nearby eco-village.

4.2.3 eco-village Bahia

It wasn't all that far away, but Diana was more excited than me as she had never visited the place before. After a one hour bus ride, a little motorboat took us across the water to a pretty arid island. Having walked one and a half hour along the coast in the burning morning sun, we could see palm trees arising in the distance like an oasis. Little kids and young parents were playing in a water basin that we had to cross in order to get to the village. The expecting couple were sitting around a wooden table with two other young and very eased looking women. All around them were palm trees holding hammocks and unusual, colorful constructions. Many activities took place in these constructions such as group discussions, women circles discussing feminine topics, meditation, aura reading, working with dreams, shamanic rituals, dancing, movies, yoga, sauna and natural birth giving. We were welcomed and introduced to some other people before we were eventually introduced to Paul, the founder of the place, a Dutchman married to a Portuguese lady. They had dreamed about an ecovillage in the tropics for a while and when they arrived she knew that it was this place she had seen in a vision. Paul had some things to arrange but I was more than welcome to stay, put on my tent and even have a discount on the restaurant food. The food was very varied, vegetarian and mostly organic, coming from neighboring farms or from the center, thirty minutes by community transport. The cultivation projects of the village were still in development and did not suffice to generate meals for everyone.

The process of making fertile soil here takes a long time as the scarce organic material, mainly coconut-tree leaves, has to be collected and composted. Yet, four thousand fruit trees had so far been planted and in a fruit forest (agro-forest system) papaya, mango, pineapple, watermelon and banana could be found. Apart from this fruit forest there were the many coconuts trees that had already been there. Sometimes people are fasting and eat only coconut or drink coconut juice. Most of the forty adults living in the village had gone through an extraordinary diet called *viver de luz*. This means that you 'live from light' during twenty-one days. Aside from the one hour a day that is reserved for discussing how you feel with an appointed person, you remain in silence. During the first week you don't drink nor eat. During the second week you can drink juice of 20% fruit, during the third week this is 40% fruit juice. In order to be able to live simple, happy, in the moment and above all as a group, Paul explained me, it is a good thing to get to work on your consciousness and get to know yourself. Conflicts arise when people are separated, while 'spiritual group work' makes people feel connected. Various practices, including this diet are meant to help with that. This is an individual experience but "*when we work on the inside, this starts to reflect on the outside*", he clarified.

Children are central in the community. "*Often it was them that brought us here. In many different ways but mostly in terms of energies, before being born. The future is theirs, we want to show them a new world*". Young parents were indeed spending lots of time with the many toddlers of the village. The village (free) school was open to children from the surrounding area and a project helping children in harsh situations was being developed.

The residents or families have their own houses and land. The rule is that ninety percent of the land remains green, without construction. Houses can't be build higher than seven and a half meters. The roof has to be made from a certain palm fiber, all the houses have this roof. Three basic rules of relating characterize the village: no bad talking about each other, no making of assumptions and always do your best. Besides a well-organized eco village that hosts a number of residents in separated houses, this place is also a 'residential center for human development'. Groups and individuals come visit for workshops, retreats, spiritual weddings and other events. Rituals with ayahuasca are held here as well.

4.2.4 Festina

From this eco-village I traveled to *festina*, a community near a little village neighboring a national park. In the village I sensed a special atmosphere. There was a lot of life outside and the streets and bars were filled with eco-tourists, natives with dreadlocks, ecologists originating from Brazilian cities and travelers from around the world that had stayed around. From the village it was a one and a half hour walk to the community. The people I had met in the village knew Festina as a cool place and its people as good people. Because of

their way of life and care for the environment, they were treaded with great respect and capoeira lessons were given to them for free. Several people that I had met on the way had recommended me to visit this place. It is a *"living organism composed by persons, trees and animals and formed by mountains, rivers and sweat. [..] Every element is a source of energy that supplies, transforms and enriches. Festina is pulsing live. A dream manifested in matter.. Festina is simplicity and ecology"*, their website displays. When I finally reached the place by *moto taxi* it was already getting late. It had been an impressive journey through the forest and cross rivers. After introducing myself to a teenage girl that was the first person I encountered and told her about the reason of my visit, she raised her shoulders and said I should be talking to Toni. She did not look surprised by my unannounced visit and therewith I assumed this occurred quite often.

There were eight permanent residents during my stay of which six were not older than thirty. After spending a year in the community, one was allowed to construct a house. Almost every day one or more visitors arrived. Some had heard talking about the place and came for the first time, others had visited the place before or had lived here in the past. Toni was older than the rest of the people that were hanging around in front of the communal kitchen. He had a small posture, a short grey beard and a friendly face. He welcomed me as if I had been expected and put Felipe in charge of showing me around. Mango eating monkeys curiously looked down from the trees. The tour led past the '*Cagador'*, a rotating dry toilet; '*composto'*, the compost; '*oficina'*, the workspace; '*SAF'*, an agroforest system; '*herbario'*, the herbal garden; '*morada casa de pedra'*, a stone house for residents; '*morada cabana'*, a hut also for residents; '*casa verde'*, for visitors; '*casa das ervas'*, where many sorts of herbs were dried to sell; and '*SET'*, Systema de Evapo-Transpiração, a sustainable production technology on which I will return later on. Most residents live in ecologically constructed houses. In the '*casa das ervas'*, Nina was making herbal soap to sell in the village. She was a very talkative, energetic and expressive person and lived at Festina for already twenty years. She had raised her children here, but they were now living in the village. Where Toni could be regarded as the father of the family – although he would not say so himself- Nina I could well imagine as the mother. As they had been among the founders they were strongly concerned with the organization of the community. Festina did not have electricity, but some solar panels were collecting energy for the more relevant things. In the communal kitchen were some light bulbs and a radio. One laptop was available for the building of a website and other community related things. Three times a day a horn shelf was blown that could be heard through the whole place, meaning that it was time for food. Everyday two people took responsibility for preparing the food of the day. The others helped on the land, with the herbs, the soap or with tidying and cleaning *"for a better energy"* as one of the members put it in a German accent. One day this same man brought the group to the top the '*cucurutu'*, a nearby hill, to bring out an oration to the universe. We ended up repeating "*raaamaaa*" into the valley for sixty four times and saying a complex prayer involving both '*Mãe terra'* as well as '*Deus'*. His explanation on the point of praying included

again energies and vibrations as well as extra-terrestrial life, which was beyond my understanding. The community mornings were reserved for communal work, while the rest of the day people relaxed, worked for themselves, continued working on the land or went to work outside the community.

Before setting at the large tables to consume the vegetarian, mostly fresh and organic food, some music was often made. One day a song was played that originated from a man I had met in Goiás, revealing new links between these communities. Another link was revealed when Felipe told me about a guru he had once met on a community in Goiás during the preparations for a *FICA*, the yearly international festival for alternative communities. This man, with whom he had drunk ayahuasca and that had taught him several things about life, appeared to be Ali. Felipe was born in Colombia and had studied on university college in Texas. His parents were wealthy landlords with whom his relation had become complicated. The others residents had either a German or a Brazilian background, but most of them had little contact with their family as well.

After making music together, everyone held hands in a circle with closed eyes. Whoever felt like it could speak some words of gratitude. Thanks were brought to mother earth and everything and everyone that had put energy in the whole process to the creation of this meal: *"We thank mother earth and father universe for this food. We thank those who planted, those who took care, those that harvested and those that cooked. That this food will feed our bodies and our minds, amen"*, Toni spoke the first time I joined. Similar messages were shared before all other meals. At times a long and resonating '*Ohm*' was produced simultaneously to conclude the thanking, stimulating a feeling of oneness.

A significant share of the food, especially fruits, vegetables, leaves and beans, came straight from the garden. Some things, such as corn and rice, that are too labour intensive to produce or to which the soil would not give way had to be bought in the village. "*I think we still buy more than we produce*" Toni told me, "*because our work isn't just agriculture. We didn't specialize in agriculture*". Rice they had tried to grow already but "*the earth didn't respond"*, Toni explained. Aside from the varied production, time is spend on construction, receiving visitors, education and parties. Every Monday, the planning for the week is discussed together and the activities of the previous week are analyzed. The topic of organizing the yearly *ENCA* came up, the national encounter of alternative communities, concluding that it would only be of benefit to the community if it was to be organized well. Experiences were that this festival was fun but could either leave a mess or good in the sense of knowledge and the development of construction and production.

Photo page case two

Picture 4.2.1: Community dorm Goiás

Picture 4.2.2: a fruit forest

Picture 4.2.3: Ali

Picture 4.2.4: Solar panel eco-village

4.3 Political communities MST

From Bahia I travelled to the hilly state of Minas Gerais where I would be meeting with Tina in a university city. I had contacted Tina, a communications student involved in the local social movements, through the social hosting site couchsurfing.org before my departure to Brazil. The next day she introduced me to a friend of hers who was also a student as well as an active member of the *Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra* (MST). After explaining him my cause he told me that a young lady would be travelling for work to '*Franka*', an MST settlement about an hour away from the city, so that I could travel with her. To get a more complete image I decided to also visit an encampment more or less nearby. As the camping members had recently been expelled from a neighboring *fazenda*, they were now continuing their political struggle alongside the road while celebrating and cultivating on little pieces of land. The following encounters took place on these two sites.

4.3.1 Franka

Adriana, the girl I would be traveling with, was about my age and just graduated. She came traveling from another state where her parents had been involved with the movement since she was a child. She had finished a course on agriculture that was offered by the movement and was asked work on a project for three years on the settlement *Franka,* where thirty familes were settled. She had visited the place once, at its initial phase five years before. The girl was nervous and scared to get lost and although my indications were still on Tina's table, she was happy I was there with her. On advice of the bus driver we got out on the wrong place. Luckily a sympathetic man on a horse-drawn carriage held a long chat that came down to the fact that we had to go back. No-one we came across was very familiar with the settlement. During the two rides we got next we were declared idiots. "*Are you insane? Are you going there to catch bullets?*" and expressions as such sounded to me as if the media had done its job. Eventually *Andrey*, the MST representative of the region, came driving towards us. His driver, a member that unlike himself had not been drinking, was originally from the area that I had just left behind.

While we came driving up the lively space of the settlement, a man on horseback came towards us and cheerfully reached Andrey a can of beer from the plastic bag he was carrying. Just a few seconds after continuing his journey he returned and apologized: "*sorry, off course you are not the only one that drinks*" he said and gave Adriana and me a can as well. This was very much appreciated. We drove past a man that looked like Micheal Jackson in his younger days. He stopped walking and curiously greeted us while carrying a torch and file firmly to his chest. According to my first impressions this had to be a happy place; everyone was greeted, everyone knew what was going on in the life of the other, people seemed happy and many were drinking beer.

Andrey had to go to the bank and we joined him to the city. After a short visit to the bank he took us to a bar where two big bottles of beer were emptied within no time. Andrey was talking and talking in a very funny way. He obviously was a key person of the community and had quite some political experience. He talked about the trip he had made to Spain for a talk about the MST and one to Mexico for a meeting of Via Campesina. In Spain he had been drinking a lot on his hotel room as it was winter and he felt lonely. On the bar there were little bottle with chillies in oil. The label said: *FRANKA, pimenta revolucionaria.* The spiced oil was made in the community and put on about every dish. Andrey was selling these bottles and started telling me passionately about Franka;

In the Germany of the nineteen twenties, Franka had joined the Young Communists at a very young age. Later on she was organizing political activities in Berlin until she was arrested and imprisoned for two months on the age of eighteen. Eventually, at the age of twenty six, she was called to Brazil to join the revolution. On arrival Franka met the man whom she was to marry, a famous figure in the resistance of those days. Within a year however, they were betrayed and on the commands of president Vargas, Franka was deported to Germany. After giving birth, Franka got gassed in a concentration camp at the age of thirty four.

Andrey appeared very talented in the telling of revolutionary stories. Yet, it became clear that keeping the community together with stories was a pretty hard job. The community members were complaining about everything taking so long, about not being informed on reunions, about a lack of facilities, about others not being prepared to work or about having too much gossip and too little freedom. Leaving the community was on some people's mind: "*I want to move forwards not backwards*" an older woman cried to me. A mother of a 5 year old girl came to the settlement to take care of her sick mother and said: "*There's nothing to do here, obviously I prefer the city*".

Jerry, the young man that we had come across when we drove up the settlement, was awaiting Adriana and me at a one floor building where we could be staying. Initially he was heading towards school but then figured he could go the next day as well as he was just to hand in some exercises in mathematics and sociology and it had started to rain. Apart from a small table in the kitchen and some old chairs and matrasses, Jerry's room was the only furnished room in the house. Adriana immediately started cleaning and opening the windows to combat the strong smell cigarettes, humidity and something undefinable that originated from the toilets. After sleeping the first night in one of the empty rooms we had to switch to another one as the roof was leaking and the walls were mouldy. Adjoining to the kitchen was a patio where many old school chairs were placed in a circle facing a chalkboard. "*For reunions*", said Jerry while writing his name on it. He was happy to finally have some company. Normally he went to bed very early because the hollow house scared him. Several times I had to ask him to slow down his speech as it became hard for me to follow.

That same night another young woman, Shelly, arrived. She was following a master degree in sociology and at the same time spending time in this community and supporting the movement with what she called 'militant work'. She was very social and talkative and the community seemed happy to have her around. A neighbour that came over for a chat – and who was even harder for me to follow- explained that each individual or family in the community has its own terrain. In the past there was a collective piece of land and in the future there would be one again. Other MST communities had collective land and collective machinery and those were functioning very well.

For breakfast were cream crackers with butter and very sweet coffee. Two more students arrived and there was a reunion on the patio on the planning of a four day long reunion on the theme of production. This reunion would initially be taking place here, but was now moved to Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state. Several people were not happy with this last minute change. They would have liked to be informed three days before due to work. The cows had to be milked and now they were not able to go. But for other MST communities this was the only possibility.

Jerry, Adriana and me decided to go for a walk around the community and visit the families, giving me a good insight on how the news was spreading. In the afternoon there was a reunion in one of the sober houses about a chicken-range project. Some chickens and pigs were caged in front of the house. The (financial) possibilities were discussed of having a bigger chicken run for the community. Things had to be discussed several times and people referred to previous failures to express their scepticism; "*I've already done enough today, I can't carry everything. It's not going to happen anyway. Nothing is carried out. I'm leaving this place*", one of the women expressed herself. As everyone seemed in need of money and focusing on improvement of their situation, the community interests were sometimes impeded by personal interests. Collective thinking is impeded by distrust and especially the fear to do more than the other, staggering goodwill. This way, before getting started with any job a lot of energy was already used. Once the students and Andrey started the construction of the run, others commented things like "*no-one asked me anything*" or "*I already did this and that*".

The bottlenecks of the community system that came to the fore on a daily basis had much to do with its integration in a capitalist system. The norm was that among the little possessions of the community members, in every hollow-brick house a television was broadcasting one soap after the other, interrupted by commercials every ten minutes. Where the soaps feed a discontent by showing only 'perfect' people in a 'perfect' environment, the commercials stall everything that is needed to satisfy the created cravings; products for a perfect skin, hair and body, the perfect outfits and the perfect stuff to collect around you. For the residents however, these soaps also served to kill time as well as to escape their own reality for a while. "*Here we are only waiting and waiting and nothing is as was promised*", one of the members said with the rusting snow on the television screen behind her. Time after time they were stalled off with promises. The houses that were to be constructed were only made

out of cardboard, in miniature, while they started measuring six years ago. "*I didn't even want a house from the INCRA* (government). *We could have had constructed it ourselves*", another resident told to me. The majority of the residents had given up their trust in the support of the INCRA. On the other hand this was their only hope. How do you get things done without any means? This gets even more complicated when a lack of peasant experience is involved. Practically all the youth wants to leave and the adults cannot do much else than agree with them; "*You're wasting your time if you stay here*", they argue.

Shelly was helping Jerry with his Sociology exercises. The first question was on structure and practice: "What is the relations between these according to 'immobile' people with prejudgements?". "*They believe that structure is not changeable or they are unaware so they claim that everything is how it is and will stay like that, exploitation for example*", was Shelly's answer. "*Yes, but we want the power to bring about change. And once we are up there, in power, we either adapt to that environment or are in minority and back to square one*", Jerry's responded while imagining to infiltrate the hierarchical state politics. "*We are not in minority! We are the people, we have the power*", was Shelly reply.

Back home we ate the usual rice and beans with 'Franka' revolutionary chili sauce. Sometimes there was spaghetti or some vegetable next to it. The discovery I had soon made was that the strong, almost toxic smell that wouldn't leave the toilet, found its origins in the beans. This food, like rice, can be industrially produced so cheaply that the community members couldn't even bother growing much else than vegetables. Besides, *arroz e feijão* is generally regarded as the national dish. Currently, the federal university of Viçosa (UFV) was assisting the community with the start-up of collective projects including permaculture and a bamboo chicken range. The INCRA, the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian reform, has been enrolled in the development of a sustainable housing project including a *SET* (Systema de Evapo-Transpiração) on this settlement, but nothing concrete had yet been seen by the residents. One of the movements principles is not to use pesticides in agricultural practices. While some members joined the movement out of conviction of its principles, for many it is merely a way out of the situation they found themselves stuck in. The political structure of the movement is organized from below. On the micro level within communities, small groups of people push forward representatives that are responsible for obtaining information at reunions and informing the community.

4.3.2 MST encampment

The projects that were developing in cooperation with the university on *Franka*, would initially be implemented at this encampment. When this encampment got dispelled however, the projects moved to Franka while a share of the residents of this camp moved to the border of the road. After a short break in the university city, I arrived to their place by bus. This time the neighborhood was familiar with the community and I wasn't even warned for any bullets. From far I saw a red flag waving high on a stick. When I approached I found some

people – several men and one women- gathered in front of a row of huts that were constructed from wood, metal plates and garbage bag material. A boney dog started barking and was shouted after; "*Sem Terra*!". The news that I was coming had reached the residents through Bobinho, a big guy that was staying here but visited *Franka* with frequency; Andrey, who's responsibility covered also this community; and Shelly and the other students that were also involved here. A reunion was just started and I was introduced by Andrey, after which I explained the reasons for my visit. From time to time the reunion was interrupted by the honk of a car or truck after which the residents yelled and waved. "*Friends of the movement*", they explained.

The place I was shown to drop my bag and later on sleep was one of the bigger huts. One half was community kitchen and on the other half were many beds and mattresses. Whoever felt like taking a nap could be found here. Inside and around the huts, banners were secured with slogans as: "*agrarian reform for social justice and popular sovereignty*" and on the doors of the huts were several posters. There was a poster of the 25th '*estadual*' encounter of the movement. Another one was showing an airplane distributing toxics over a plate of food accompanied by the text; "*Each Brazilian consumes an average of 5,2 litters of agro-toxics a year. How long are we going to swallow this? Permanent campaign against agro-toxics and for life. Agro-toxics kill*". It was a poster they had brought along from an encounter where Via Campesina had also been present. Yet another poster showed a beaten up black women in MST shirt and handcuffs with a sign hanging on her chest. On the sign was the text; Name: social movement, crime: fighting for rights, punishment: prison.

The first resident with whom I entered in conversation, Pico, already managed to amaze my thoughts with his stories and way of speech. His heart seemed too good for what he had experienced. His parents were originally from Angola. They had gone back there and he had not seen them for twenty-nine years. Today he was feeling sad. It was his forty-seventh birthday. In the past it was around this date that he received a message from his family. Now he wasn't even sure if they were still alive. He used to be a truck driver like his brother with whom he was always in contact. But now he had not heard from him for two months and had started to worry as one his brother had once asked him to take care of his wife and kids, would he come to decease. "*What you are doing*", he then said, "*I don't call that living. You travel from here to there and every time people say goodbye and it is as if some-one dies, because you will never see them again*". Visitors like me had come from other cities, states, Latin-American countries, Europe, Canada and even Korea, many stories went on the latter. "*Here, every day is the same. Only on Fridays more people arrive and we make a party*". Pico's hut was not bigger than five square meters, completely dark and the place where he isolated himself after drinking *pinga*. "*My previous hut was bigger*", he said. "*But there's is every chance that we have to leave tomorrow. Than we have to tear it all down and construct again. I don't need anything else*". His hut was the first one in the row and he complained that he was the only person abled to protect the camp, the others were too big, too scared or cripple.

Bobinho took me on a tour to where they had been settled. To me, there was not much to see. Just some burned out pieces of wood, remains of brick foundations and some cans. But Bobinho talked vividly and remembered exactly how it used to be and who's hut had been where. "*This is the place where the helicopter landed*", he said a short walk later. As we walked on he explained: "*Here we stood in front of the mass of officers*" and "*This is where we had our kitchen-garden*". The evacuation had occurred three months before, but this was the first time he went back. Eventually he stopped underneath a tree and I could see he was getting emotional; "*This is the place where we had our first coffee together*", he said.

Later on, at the community well, I encountered Perlinha. She appeared to me as a resolute women that stood up for her rights without being too much concerned with the business of the others. She was always busy doing her own things. Most of the time she was washing clothes; "*There's no end to it*". She talked and talked. Her life had been on the street, but she had always managed to find a place to sleep. Her children didn't ever have to sleep outside. "*Graças a Deux*" she had never started drinking. Her youngest son was living with her and was always cheerful. Her other son was addicted to drugs, but she couldn't worry about him anymore. Perlinha had one dream; "*um sitio*", a little house of her own with a piece of land. She also expressed a lot of dignity; "*If buying a toothbrush means that I have to work for a boss, then I clean my tooth with plants*". Having only a house means you have to work for a boss and she knows that this is what she doesn't want.

As several people told me, their struggle for land involves a lot of effort and little outcome. The amount of occupations more or less equals the amount of evacuations. But the struggle and reunions gives them a goal and ties the group together. In comparison to Franka, more sense of unity was found here. Here, they live together on a small plot with little private property and relatively little tasks and obligations. "*If anyone drops down, we all help and everyone knows that. We are brothers*", one of the men said. There is enough time to meet, discuss, talk, eat and celebrate together. But the division of labor was an issue here as well. "*If everyone would do just a little, everything is fine. After that there is time to sleep and eat. What kind of life is one of only sleeping and eating?*", said a member who was always busy doing something. Early in the mornings he went fishing. When he returned he pulled on his overall and started carrying water and working in the garden or working on bamboo constructions. "*The well doesn't look like anything and no-one cares*", he once said. "*There's mud and frogs falling in, it should be covered*". Participation was also an issue at times. The stream of information on reunions went from person to person and was therewith not always as perfect. Sometimes it was also hard for people to participate as the reunions took place far away and transport could not always be arranged. In general however, the community was like a big family, fun was made and everyone helped out where possible.

Photo page case three

4.3 Encountering space, people and practices

Picture 4.3.1: MST settlement

Picture 4.3.2: MST encampment

4.4 Summary

These descriptions provide a general image of the sites of research as well as the views, practices and worries of the community members. The social practices within the community of case one follow from a detailed neohumanist philosophy in which "all is love" and are aimed at developing the consciousness. The people encountered at this site are mainly followers of this philosophy, but also people interested in sustainable living, students involved in sustainable agriculture and volunteers from near and far. The central practices of community members can be found to surround food and involve its production as well as consumption. The means of production and consumption are aimed at restoring relations with the environment and one another, feeding the body and mind and therewith lift states of consciousness. The communities from the second case are diverse but have in common a strong connection to the ecology, a high mobility of people, an international character and the blending of belief systems from different times and spaces. Most 'members' have either explicitly given preference to this type of life or are traveling around. Their practices also surround sustainable food production, but this is seen as a side issue. They are more focused on celebrating life and 'living in harmony' with nature that includes man. The indigenous brew called ayahuasca is familiar to these communities but is much more explicitly and extensively consumed by the members of the first community that is treated in this second case. The brew has a central role here and its consumption is (inter)related to the worldviews, thoughts and practices of community members. The third case demonstrates a yet very different reality. Less time and (financial) means have been available for these communities to develop. Members have entered for many different reasons but have in common a difficult past of losing land, being exploited or living on the street. The movement focuses on socio-political (land) reform whereas the practices of members surround land. Generally, these practices are occupations, reunions, agriculture and celebrations. In the next chapter the role of food, ayahuasca and land on the communities of each case respectively will be central.

5. The practice of reflexive knowledge and the force of stuff

As the previous chapter has been able to reveal, the community members of the different communities all embody unique experiences. Looking at the separate cases, the communities reflect differently on modernity due to their different experiences as well as means available. In reflecting we are enabled and constrained by what we are or embody, by our social surroundings as well as all other matter we connect with.

The encountered communities share a critique towards modernity with regard to its social and environmental outcomes. Consequently, they made a journey to the countryside in order to reconstruct and share specific views on how to relate to their surrounding human and non-human environment. In recreating reality, it is the negotiated meaning attached to these surroundings that glues the community together. Feelings of togetherness and belonging are articulated as shared views find their practice in the sharing of specific meals, rituals, celebrations, struggles and land.

Human bodily conditions, thoughts and acts are co-shaped by the vibrant surroundings they connect with as well as by the meanings attached to these surroundings in interactions, practices. A description of central vibrant matters and the performed practices around these matters, reveals meaning and reflexive knowledge as well as insights on the nature and boundaries of the communities, from which challenges can be drawn. The following sections will be organized respectively around the materiality or 'vibrant matter' of food, tea and land. Emphasising the vibrancy of matter in approaching the social allows the close, subtle and sensitive relations between the human and the non-human to come to the fore. It also fades dualities and boundaries, enabling the characteristics of and resolutions for modern risks to be revealed.

5.1 Edible matter

In the third chapter of her book, Bennett treats 'Edible matter' as material agency, as vital materiality that runs in and through bodies. To the role of backgrounds (context), resources (tools or means) and constraints in social processes, she adds the role of matter -such as foodstuffs- as 'actant'. 'You are what you eat', we often hear and some truth can be found within this statement. By concentrating on edible matter as possessing agency -which is most easily illustrated by its diverse transformative powers on the body as well as its effects on the mood- Bennett challenges the idea that "*what people "want" is a personal preference entirely of their own making*" (:40). According to Nietzsche and Thoreau, she writes, "*eating constitutes a series of mutual transformations between human and non-human materials*" (:40). Referring to Nietzsche's work on foodstuffs, she writes that "*edible matter appears as a powerful agent, as stuff that modifies the human matter with which it comes into contact*" (:44). Bennett's theory is

interesting in order to approach and understand the role of food in the organization of the neohumanist community of the first research case.

Expressed concerns of members reflecting on modernity's outcomes relate to social and environmental injustices and degradations and point to modernity's material fetish and the related shortsightedness and lack of spirituality. The importance of food in this community is emphasized by the thoughts and practices of involved community members. A concern is expressed towards its industrial means of production and towards the nature of the social and socio-environmental relations that these means have brought about. In fact, a main critique on modernity is its view of humans and nature as separate things and the alienation resulting from this. What is most remarkable of this community is the emphasis on the 'self' *in relation to* these issues. A young devoted member of the movement and frequent visitor of the farm, expressed his concern as follows:

> *"What provokes me more lately is the issue of food and our relation with nature, a totally segregated relationship. [..] It's all very distant and not just physically. When you're living in the city you don't have any direct relation, everything that you use from nature is industrialized and you don't even know what happened in the process. You don't know who made it, how, why and if that what you are eating is good or bad. I believe that the bigger, global issues that seem hard to grasp, like natural disasters and petroleum issues, are related to this as well" (*Frank*).*

The expressed concerns can be observed in reflexive practices that focus on restoring such relations. With regard to the practices of the community this respondent stressed that the community project:

> *"forms part of the movement proposal that focuses on local and rural development. The idea is that this site forms a model of how to live in all senses, not just personal life but also on how to work the land, how to produce food. This should serve to contribute in the development of the whole region, not just this community" (*Frank*).*

The socio-environmental practices of the community are focused on the view they share of life and progress, which differs fundamentally from the 'modern' view on progress. Approaching food as a central materiality consents to uncover the community members' backgrounds, worldviews, practices and networks.

Specific transformative powers of different foodstuffs are elaborated upon in the philosophy of the movement and members are therewith provided with a guide of what to eat, how to eat it and why. This section includes these ideas. Following, light is shed on the practices of food consumption and production by community members. Subsequently, the globalized nature of the situated reflexive knowledge is portrayed by tracing the network of the produced and consumed foodstuffs. A summary of the treated views and practices around food will conclude the section of this first case.

5.1.1   The Sattvic Diet

Members of this movement in general and the people involved with this community in specific, support a '*sattvic'* or a yogic diet that -like the movement- has its roots in India. The diet is closely tied to the practice of meditation and yoga which are fundamental practices for this community. The aim of yoga, one respondent states, is "*union*", "*to unite the micro with the macro consciousness*" (Phill). By following this diet, it is reasoned, one nourishes the body and the mind to facilitate the process towards '*supreme consciousness'* which could be defined as '*the constant effort of the mind to bridge the gap between the finite and the infinite*' (Inaytullah, 1988:56). The focus is on the consumption of food that encloses a 'vital energy' in order to reach this goal. Guidelines for this diet divide food into three categories of 'goodness': 'Sattvic' or 'Sentient', 'Mutative' and 'Static'.

Best foodstuffs are Sattvic or Sentient, by which is meant that these contain a vital energy that provides most benefits for the body and mind. Sattvic food is considered as "*healthy, simple, fresh and local, easy to digest and nutritious*" (Nixon, 2007:8). Sattvic food includes fruits, legumes, grains, beans, lentils, peas, honey, some roots, cereals, milk products, nuts, some spices, herbal teas, oil and vinegar. The consumption of Sattvik food, it is argued, is beneficial to- and eases the practice of meditation and yoga. It is mentioned that the combination of yoga and sattvik food increases the sensitiveness and awareness of the physical and mental existence. Mutative foods are less beneficial for the body and mind. The diet warns for a the consumption of a surplus of these foods due to its stimulating effects and the ability to disturb the restfulness and subtleness of mind and body which complicates the practice of yoga and meditation and therewith hinders conscious growth. Mutative food includes stimulants such as chocolate, coffee, black tea, fizzy soft drinks and hot spices. Static food lastly, is categorized as having a negative impact on the body and mind and followers are therefore advised to avoid any these foods completely. Meat, fish, eggs, garlic, onion, mushrooms and tobacco, alcohol and drugs are to be excluded from the diet as they are blurring the mind and destructive for the body.

The vitality of the food's energy lies not only in the sort of food and its nutritional values. It lies also in its freshness and the energy that is added during the process of production, preparation and consumption. Followers are advised not only to consider what they eat, but also to consider the amounts, the mode of consumption as well as the way it is produced. Members stress that nutrition is important, but a change in consciousness should precede. Practices around food are supported by an ambition to revise and improve one's relation with the self and the surroundings. Food is therefore qualified in terms of connectedness and attention involved in the process. The following sections will respectively treat the consumption and production of food. In essence, as neohumanism sees all as love, all is ought to be practiced with love towards people and things, a love that comes from within these things as well as from within the self.

5.1.2   Consuming Love

Food thus plays a vital role within the worldview of this community. The meanings attached to it are accurately elaborated upon in the extensive writings of their Guru and that of various followers. The means of compliance to these guidelines can be observed in the performances of the diet that involve a whole range of rituals. The visitors of the farm that have not embodied the philosophy of the movement adapt to this diet and the related practices of consumption and production while they are on the farm. In the weekends they tend to escape for some chocolate and alcohol and make some jokes with onions, but the ideas remain within them as they continue their journey. Meanwhile on the farm, from the land to the fork -and even after, but I'll get to that later on- great attention is offered to food. The practices that surround the production of food will be dealt with in the next section. In this section, agents' relation to food regarding its consumption will be elaborated upon by focusing on the purchase, preparation and intake.

The available food on the community comes from different places. One of the projects' main aims is to be self-sufficient and consume all the food right from the own land in order to reduce dependency and risks, increase awareness and knowledge on the food and restore relations with the surroundings, nature, 'things', people; the cosmos. For the while being self-sufficiency is a future vision that is being worked towards. While a share of the food consumed comes from the own land and another share from neighbouring organic farms, still a significant part is purchased in the city supermarket. Followers that visit the farm regularly but live somewhere else, mention to purchase food consciously and some of them grow food on plots of land elsewhere.

The purchase of food right from the community's land, requires knowledge on what is growing where. During my stay, the mango trees were the most generous of all. The mango season is quite stretched here as some trees follow each other up in their provision of fruits. Ali, a central figure of this community, welcomed me by offering me one of his favourite mangoes. He seemed experienced and skilled in purchasing them. To compare I had to try the mangoes of all the other trees, which were also his favourites. There were about six different species to be found on the farm and the participants of the camp would enjoy free moments by foraging through the trees with a stick in search for more mangoes. In an book on food published by the movement I found that the best way to purchase a fruit is to catch it at the moment it naturally falls down. With a blissful expression on his face, Ali revealed to me that when a mango falls down close to you, it is to be seen as a gift and received with gratefulness. He himself had embodied this gratefulness throughout the years and his love for his guru was radiating from his eyes. He loved him so much that outside the community he had gained the nickname Baba himself and some eyes were raised to him as if he was the guru himself. Back inside the house, the abundance of mangoes and the seemingly human weakness to resist them while hanging in the trees, could be found exhibited in brimful bags

and bowls. These mangoes however, weren't always as fresh or ripe as the ones falling down in your hands and some were to be eaten with more care due to its '*visitantes*', maggots. Bananas were abundant as well. For its purchase, the tall providing plant is brought to the ground, as it only blooms ones and then dies off. Luckily, new plants can grow again from its rhizomes. Besides the fruit of the plant, the red flower -that looks a bit like cabbage and from which the fruits grow spirally- can be prepared to be eaten as well. Other food purchased directly from the farm were guava, manioc, tomato, pumpkin, eggplant, courgette, carrot, corn, pepper and many herbs.

As Brahbra brings organic vegetables from the nearby farm and eco-park to the restaurant in the city about twice a week, she also brings what is needed from here to the farm. During my stay, she was also the one taking care of the supermarket groceries where she mainly buys some fruit, vegetables and grains when needed. Visitors at times bring some food along as well. Individual members that are involved in the project but do not live on the farm indicate to prefer the purchase of local and organic food above the purchase of industrial and foreign food. Frank indicated to prefer local above organic when this organic food is industrial or foreign:

> *"I like to buy local products and if possible I buy local organic products. But it's often hard to find organic products. Or when you find it it's really expensive. For example, organic products that you find in the supermarket are expensive and come from this company. It might be good for my health, but I don't believe it's a big thing in the social and environmental sense. I prefer local products to know where they come from and to contribute the local economy. What doesn't make sense to me is a firm from São Paolo that sells here to Brasilia. Such firms only manage to do this when they also sell to many other places. So it has a power in the market and is taking away the possibilities for local products to be consumed. There's no way for those products to compete. In the logic of the market, no one will be able to compete because the product of the bigger firm is cheaper." (Frank).*

Respondents –devotees and volunteers alike- indicate that they try to purchase consciously: vegetarian, local, organic and only what they really need. They also indicate that this is not easy and not always possible, especially in the city. Knowledge on the risks of industrial food and food production leads to the consideration of purchasing alternative food. It is mentioned that these alternatives aren't always as satisfying and that knowledge on these products is often incomplete. The purchase of local food is preferred as it supports the local community instead of big companies, it reduces the traveled distance of the products and therewith foils estrangement from the food and its process. The purchase of food produced on the own land is seen as an expression of autonomy and as risk decreasing, but is embodied in practice as a means to restore the relation between people and nature in general.

Preparation of the food always requires explicit attention. During the first week of my stay on the farm, the eco-spiritual camp demanded some extra organization with regard to the preparation of food. Every day a small group of people were devoting their time to the careful preparation of the days meals. A key person concerned with the preparation of food during as well as after this camp has been Ali, to whom I must focus a significant share of genuine attention. Ali is fifty three years old and has been a follower of the movement philosophy for thirty seven years. His life is marked by his *Baba* and he has devoted it to "*serving Dharma, the divine nature, the good, the light*" by "*inspiring people, showing them that they are divine beings, showing them techniques to improve their physical, mental and spiritual lives*" and "*helping people to elevate the collective consciousness*". Ali is a storyteller. Several times I would find him passionately telling stories in the midst of a young company. His stories were mainly lessons and anecdotes from Baba and sometimes theories about a bright future, while the catchy songs that 'came to him' were mostly about the beauty of the present, the beauty of everything as a manifestation of the cosmos, of love, the supreme consciousness, Baba. The many travels he had made through India added to the development of some special Indian-Brazilian cooking skills. Wherever I found Ali, he was never far from his mix of Indian-spices that he kept in a can. Every dish was flavoured with it. During the camp, food was cooked slowly on a mud-oven that he had been constructing outside for days. Besides cooking, making music, telling stories and providing natural (mud) therapies, building mud-ovens in varying shapes was also one of his specialities. This oven came practical for the large quantity of food required, but was said to be adding to the quality of the food as well. Following Ali, the stirring in pots and pans -which sometimes seemed to take hours- needed to occur by making spiral movements in a couterclockwise direction. This is the movement of the cosmos, I was told, while clock time merely symbolizes the view of time that came with capitalism.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are all but typically Brazilian. Where the majority of Brazilians settle with crackers and very sweet coffee in the morning, rice and beans flavoured with garlic and onion for lunch and dinner and some meat whenever available, the meals in this community are extensive, varied, vegetarian and inducing images of India. Rice and black beans can at times be found among the dishes, but then they are prepared differently and hardly ever the central dish. After the camp it was mainly Brahbra taking care of the meals, with the help of whoever was around. Brahbra made lovely curries and soups with lots of vegetables and lentils. With the ingredients around, the national and international volunteers and the camp-visitors all added their own touch to the food at times. For breakfast Brahbra baked bread, branded with a heart on top. Besides this, she makes her own mango-jelly and chutney, cakes flavoured with sugar- and chocolate replacements, muesli and yoghurt. For the yogurt, milk is collected at a neighbouring farm, which is then heated to the point that one manages to stick a finger in it for not more than 12 seconds. On every 2 litres of milk, one cup of yoghurt from the previous day is added. This is poured into jars, closed off, covered

with cloths and put on a warm place for it to cool of slowly and become yogurt the next morning.

Specific food requires specific preparation. Practices are organized around the food according to the knowledge on that food, the meanings attached to it and the characteristics of the food itself. Before having breakfast, lunch and dinner, there is meditation. An empty stomach is said to be beneficial for meditation while meditation prepares the body and mind for receiving the food. *Kiirtan*, the singing of mantra's, prepares the mind for meditation. Through *Paincajanya,* meditation at five o'clock in the morning, it is held that self-sufficiency can be realized as the focus is on the inner-self and nothing else is required. When the food is brought in and the time to eat has finally come, everyone gathers around the dishes on the floor of the big tent outside or inside Brahbra's residence when the room suffices. The food is divided among all he plates and thanks are brought out after everyone has started eating eagerly.

5.1.3 Producing love

We have come to the production of the food on the farm. The elaborated neohumanist philosophy, Brahbra, the students as well as other visiting members and volunteers have a significant influence in the process of food production. The project proposal of this community ensues from negotiations between the movement organisation, its base in India, and Brahbra. Through the restaurant and meditation centre in the capital, a cooperation of members has developed. Some of these members are visiting the farm regularly for meditation or other activities. Among the most frequent visitors are students involved with sustainable agriculture. On a regular basis they come to the farm in order to share their knowledge and ideas, to guide practices and give a hand. Together with the volunteers and Brahbra they work on the land, on constructions or in the house.

On the community area a functioning agro-forest system is established, appearing as an integrated production system where corn, tomatoes, cassava and other vegetables grow in between rows of fruit trees. Agro-forestry can be seen as a "*new name for a set of old practices*" (worldagroforestry.org) that aims to *"optimize the positive interactions between the woody and non-woody components in order to achieve a more productive, sustainable and/or diversified output from the land than is possible with conventional approaches in any given agro-ecological and socio-economic set of circumstances"* (Lundgren, 1987:206). Knowledge is needed on the interaction of species and nutrient cycles. Weeds had to be removed to reduce unwanted competition. This occurred by hand and was time-consuming, but not unpleasant as there were many hands. With regard to permaculture a *tanque de evapotransiração* (TEVAP) was being implemented. This technology caters on the water-cycles as found in nature in which several elements – plants, trees, nutrients- contribute. After flushing the toilet, the water with the 'human nutrients' is transported through pipes into a tank. Here it gets filtered through a row of discarded tires and layers of old bricks and organic material. The nutrients are

absorbed by the short root vegetation -such as banana plants and papaya trees- that is planted on top of these layers in the tank. Another piece of land was cultivated and harvested following the biodynamic calendar that is based on the position of the planets and the different phases of the moon that influence the levels of moisture on earth. This can also be seen as an ancient technology that has been 'reinvented'. Sporadically, mantra's were sung during the process of planting.

5.1.4 The food network

Tracing the network of the produced and consumed foodstuffs of this community bring us to different times and spaces. It leads us first of all to the nearby university, where students gain knowledge on sustainable production methods, to support the community. The technologies used in production of food embrace a mixture of knowledge from ancient as well as current times and different countries of the world. Also in this city, we can find the vegetarian restaurant and meditation centre where produced foodstuffs travel to and concerned people gather to eat, meditate and discuss. The means of production and consumption that define this community's foodstuffs can also be found in Europe, where whoever is interested in sustainable agriculture, more spiritual or communal living can find the community on the internet. We can also follow a trace to India, where the diet and the associated ideas originates as to many other countries in the world where the movement of which this community forms part as well as the corresponding diet is established.

Photo Page case one

5.1 Edible matter

Picture 5.1.1:Bread, edible matter.

Picture 5.1.2: The construction of a mud-oven

Edible matter

Picture 5.1.3: Production, vibrant matter in agroforestry

Picture 5.1.4: Systema de evapo-transpiração

5.1.5 Summary

A focus on vibrant food reveals a diet that is linked to the neohumanist philosophy that the core members of this community follow. Within this philosophy, which is an elaborated view on progress, all is seen as and approached with love. To embody this philosophy, members practice introspection in rituals that are believed to be facilitated by this specific vibrant diet. The knowledge in social practices around the consumption and production of food is reflexive on modernity's means of relating and reveals links to different times and spaces. The meaning attributed by supporters of the philosophy resonates in their practices of relating, in consumption as well production. The meaning attributed to the food is negotiated as the community boundaries are flexible, it is not isolated from the rest of society. Students bring in their own knowledge that can be found in the sustainable technologies implemented on the farm. Visitors and volunteers experience the taste of this food and the attributed ideas as they adapt to community practices, after which they continue their journey.

5.2 Liquid matter

As mentioned, this second case covers data found in four communities, the first one located in the state of Goiás, the other three in Bahia. The first community in is especially hard to frame as 'community' as it is composed by an extraordinary family of three people surrounded by friends and travellers. Moreover, this community is closely connected to and interacting with surrounding communities and travellers. The remaining communities (those in Bahia) can also be viewed as 'liquid', existing of a semi-dynamic 'core' and a more dynamic 'periphery' of individuals, being semi-residents, visitors and travellers.

A central 'materiality' or 'matter' that I found to hold relation to the worldviews and practices of community members is an indigenous brew named 'ayahuasca'. The ecovillage accommodates an ecological construction where ayahuasca ceremonies are held from time to time. These ceremonies are attended by the permanent residents, visitors and sometimes by the moment's residents of other Bahian communities. At one of the communities, most residents and visitors were familiar with ayahuasca but was as far as I could perceive not being consumed within the community space. It was in Goiás that I became aware of the central role of ayahuasca in everyday life. As it was here that I got to observe and participate in ceremonies, the described practices around this tea will restrains to this 'community'.

After providing my findings concerning ayahuasca and its surrounding practices, in the up-following section I will expand on my findings concerning the practices around implemented sustainable technologies and the aligned social production. Subsequently, I will elaborate upon the networks the communities holds as to uncover its characteristics, reflexive knowledge and boundaries.

An approach of the ayahuasca brew and sustainable technologies as central vibrant matters, permits to uncover the character of community members' backgrounds, worldviews, practices and networks as responses to socio-environmental risks from in which challenges can come to the fore.

5.2.1 The Ayahuasca diet

"This tea has changed my life. I make use of it whenever I can, although I'm not devoted with much frequency. I would recommend the tea to many people, on the condition that it's taken seriously, preferably within the Santo Daime doctrine. Well, everyone has different perceptions and a certain tune. It really cures, cleans, orients, accelerates processes, matures, brings light to the path and firmness in life. But you have to be open, understand the message and work to earn it. It brings you to yourself, inside of you" (Tom, Goiás).

Ayahuasca is a beverage originating from the Amazon Basin that is more and less frequently being consumed by members of various communities of this case. In the community of Goiás, the role of ayahuasca was most obviously present in everyday life. The word

ayahuasca is in Quechua and translated as '*vine of the dead*' or '*vine of the soul*' (McKenna, 1992). This refers first of all to the sinuous liana that is seen as the central component. Furthermore, it most probably refers to the power assigned to this liana of facilitating a disconnection of the soul from the body as well as access to ancestors and the spirit world (Fotiou, 2010). Its use is ancient and can with quite some certainty be traced back to 2000 B.C. (Naranjo, 1983). Ayahuasca originates from indigenous Amerindian cultures, consuming it for medicinal, spiritual and cultural purposes (Tupper, 2008). Consumption was (and is) often guided by shamans that approach plants as living sentient beings. Shamans have played a crucial role in botanic experimenting and the exploration of its powers and they can therefore be regarded as native researchers. It remains peculiar how these ancient cultures managed to match this vegetation constructing ayahuasca. Saez writes that ayahuasca can best be thought of as "*an expressive case of indigenous creativity later adopted by other peoples, one whose vitality is sufficient for academics to take it seriously*" (Labate et. al, 2008:23).

Relatively little academic research has yet been done on this vegetation, its uses and effects. Scientific research has however been increasing radically in the last two decades (Lebate et al., 2008) together with the interest of (non-indigenous) individuals for indigenous practices and those involving matter that evokes higher states of consciousness (Riba and Barbanoj, 2005), the expansion of its religions (Lebate et al., 2008), shamanic tourism as well as its potentials for therapy in the West (Fotiou, 2010). It is stated that through the consumption of ayahuasca, one increases access to 'subconscious feelings, imagery and memories' (Hoffman et al., 2001). Due to this facilitation of introspection, therapeutic effects can be achieved such as the treatment of depression, addiction and other personal problems to which profound access is stimulated. In 1993, an international and multidisciplinary health research carrying the name 'The Hoasca Project' was carried out in Brazil, in which a group of long term consumers -members of '*União do Vegetal*', the ayahuasca religion also responsible for organizing and supporting this research (Labate et al., 2008)- was followed during a period of time and medically examined. The conclusions were that "*the regular use of ayahuasca, at least within the ritual context and supportive social environment is safe and without long term toxicity, and moreover has lasting, positive influences on physical and mental health*" (Fotiou, 2010:116). Adverse reactions can follow from combining ayahuasca with certain (decayed) foods and pharmaceutical drugs such as antidepressants or 'ecstasy' (Labate et al., 2008). Following another study, focusing on evaluation of states of consciousness brought about by ayahuasca consumption, examination of new users resulted in "*radical structural and qualitative changes relative to the normal state of consciousness*" (Labate et al., 2008). However, there are reasons -related to some characteristics of the research setup- to perceive these results with some caution and more rigorous methods are desired (Lebate et al., 2008).

For the brew, the jungle liana 'mariri' or 'cipó' (*banisteriopsis caapi*) is generally combined with the leaves of the 'raínha' or 'chacrona' shrub (*Psychotria viridis*). After a careful selection, the parts of the liana are smashed with a hammer or a big knife on a stone or stump,

separating the barks from the stems. Together with the leaves, the thready barks and stems are placed into a big pot filled with water. The pot is put upon a fire and the fusion is cooked for several hours.

After drinking, this assemblage evokes an extraordinary experience within the human body. "*Its pharmacological activity is dependent on a synergistic interaction between the active alkaloids in the plants*", McKenna et al. (1998:66) write. The chacrona leaves contain dimethyltryptamine (DMT) – matter that is also present within the human brain- that is normally deactivated by matter (an enzyme named *Monoamine Oxidase*) in our body. The liana contains matter (the beta-carboline alkaloid *harmine*) that restrains our body from deactivating DMT as it inhibits the enzyme responsible for this. The 'active' molecules are then absorbed through the stomach and reach their way to the brain, enabling a visionary effect. It is interacting vibrant matter, forming alliances and assemblages that by the human act of consumption continues to interact and form alliances with vibrant matter in the body, allowing the consumer to perceive the activity of this specific combination within the body/mind. "*The experiences that I had during those travels*", McKenna -a pioneer in reporting on ayahuasca experiences- writes, "*were personally transforming and, more important, they introduced me to a class of experiences that is vital to the restoration of balance in our social and environmental worlds*" (1992:12). The force of the non-human appears in the body as well as the mind, bringing about transformations that can subsequently resonate in human perceptions, worldviews and acts.

5.2.2 Fazer cura, consuming the spirit of ayahuasca

Today the use of Ayahuasca can be found worldwide and absorbed within various (syncretic) religions. The most known of these religions in Brazil –that are also established in Europe and the US- are Santo Daime and União do Vegetal, religions that combine Christianity with indigenous rites characterized by Amazonian imagery and mythology (Fotiou, 2010). These 'modern' ayahuasca religions can be regarded as "*variations on an indigenous cultural theme that increases in potency the further they extent from it*" (Saez in Labate et. al, 2008:23). Fotiou writes that "*in the traditional–indigenous setting -ayahuasca is very important in maintaining social order and in interpreting daily life events*" (2010:11). In this respect it is the shaman that uses it to restore relations between the spirits and the 'real' world (Fotiou, 2010). In the modern setting, the maintenance of social order and interpretation of events still seems of importance as the tea evokes similar transformations within a diversity of individuals.

The community members I encountered referred to participating in an ayahuasca ceremony as '*trabalhar e fazer cura*', to work and heal. They demonstrated respect to all ceremonial styles but were not strict devotees to one religion in specific. In some ceremonies various religions were embraced, in some one specific branch (but already being a blend of belief systems), while in others the focus was not so much on religion. In Goiás, the tea was consumed by members for different purposes. Motivations varied from the seeking for guidance (the

search for answers to life questions), the exploration of consciousness, for healing or for pleasure. The visitors of the sacred medicine festival seemed to be adapting themselves with ease to the different ceremonies in which ayahuasca (among other 'sacred medicines') was served. Some of them were predetermined to attend specific rituals and had subscribed themselves in advance at an affiliated bar in the centre of the city. Behind a table, covered and surrounded by colourful posters and arts, a lady with an English accent mentioned that subscription was required.

Preparations for attending an ayahuasca ceremony external to this festival occurred more or less spontaneously. It was on the third day of my stay in this community that I was to join the group and participate in my first ceremony. The day had been laid back and mainly filled with conversations. When the evening approached the idea developed to organize and head off to join a ritual. Organizing meant dressing up, getting excited for what was ahead and waiting for the last people to get into the car. It was an extraordinary company: Our host who had dressed in white; a traveller with a Hare Krishna haircut in a Hindu printed t-shirt; Sol, a young student interested in Kabala, Umbanda and Krishna who had painted a yellow stripe from her forehead the nose; a teenage girl visiting her travelling dreadlocked boyfriend; and her curious and protective mother from São Paolo who was driving us to the ceremony.

We arrived at a quiet and luxuriantly vegetated site where some other cars were parked along the sandy road. At the left side of the road where we had parked, we had to make our way through the green and past a kitchen. In front of the kitchen a little girl was sitting in a chair, showing some impressive paintings on her lap. This girl directed us to the roofed but open construction where different practices were taking place.

We were welcomed friendly and handed a '*hinário*', a little booklet with chants. The singing and dancing were already going on, the women in lines on the one side and the men, in fewer numbers, on the other. In between was a table with cups and bottles filled with the tea. A short, friendly looking, middle aged lady dressed in purple clothing was serving tiny cups of tea to whoever appeared at her table. The first row of girls wore colourful dresses. They were dancing and singing fanatically and trying to coordinate the songs and everyone's steps while guiding the rhythm with maracas. The songs dealt with the beauty of nature, divine love, union, the coming of a new age, humble attitudes, celestial bodies and the universe as well as with Christians saints, while the walls were covered with images of Ghandi, Jezus, Ganesh and 'Mestre Irineu', the founder of Santo Daime. This singing and dancing continued for hours and cups continued to be served to those who felt like drinking. Before handing me over the tea, the short lady in purple looked up and asked how I was doing. I was doing perfectly fine and hoped the tea would help me understand the idea of this ceremony a bit better.

Meanwhile in the adjoining space, that was decorated with pillows and matrasses, people were lying, sitting silently, singing or selecting leaves for the tea that was being prepared outside. A man and a women dressed in white garments were stirring in big pans with sincere devotion as the preparation is ought occur accompanied with '*bom pensamento*', good thoughts. After some hours I began to doubt if the singing and dancing would ever be coming to an end so I walked around to take some pictures and eventually sat down on a pillow in the pillowed space. Here, I found our driver embracing her daughter, both sitting down as well. The daughter had her face in her hands that were leaning on her knees she had pulled up. They weren't speaking. When I asked how they were doing, the mother answered that she didn't really feel anything strange. When the others appeared she proposed to drive us back.

While we made our way back to the car I suddenly became aware of the effects of the tea. A tall man appeared through an arch of vegetation and said "*are you already leaving? Come back tomorrow if you like. Thank you so much for your dedication and great energy*". He greeted us by taking our hands shortly between his and it all seemed more and more surreal to me. When we continued our path I got distracted by the green surroundings we were walking through and was completely overtaken by its beauty. I did not understand the rush of the others at all but eventually managed to catch up with them. When I arrived at the car, the mother lighted a cigarette and the student was hugging a tree. While I took a picture of this to me extraordinary setting, someone behind me commented "*it gives her energy*". The car ride back was too bumpy for my stomach to handle. My neighbour was praying 'hare Krishna' nonstop and in top speed. As I needed all my strengths to concentrate on controlling my stomach, I begged him to hush. Luckily this was threatening enough to silence him and we all managed to arrive 'home' safely.

My company joined the others that were already sleeping on the wooden plateau upstairs, some after grabbing or preparing some food in the communal kitchen. Meanwhile, I could not stop gazing at the moon, the loads of bright stars and the purple lightening in the distant sky. It was astonishing. Although these were phenomena we had sung about, I did not get the idea that the ritual had triggered this experience. The tea had made me feel more awake and alive than ever and I felt a strong urge to wake everyone up and attend them on the meaning and the beauty of life. Furthermore, I wished to thank them for being. But I managed to resist as I assumed they had all experienced this before. So instead, I took my sleeping bag from upstairs and set myself in a hammock in the open air, the place from which I was to wait for the sun and experience the overwhelming and unforgettable powers of this tea.

Facing the hosts, my travel company and community visitors the next day, it felt like I had been inaugurated into their world of love, freedom, unity and celebration. Nothing else seemed much relevant. Now I understood their ways and means of relating, especially of those who had been here longer or before. I was embraced firmly and sincerely by everyone.

Ali –who by that time had adopted the role of a father to me- and Phill –a monk in a holiday mood- were laughing. "*Already*", they strangely agreed. I understood that they were happy that my experience had been so good and that they were glad I had done it. I had been fasting with them that day, which most probably had an impact on the intensity of my experience. "*Baba Nam Kevalam*", I thought, but with much more understanding than before. Upstairs, where some people were still sleeping on mats on the wooden floor, one of the visitors who had not joined us the previous day surprised me as he laid his hand on my bare foot when I past and said "*my, your energy is strong today*". An euphoric feeling of love for everything, brotherhood and connectedness endured over me in the following days.

A couple of days later, the hosts and their little son and some of the visitors prepared for another ceremony. This time it was a *Santo Daime* ceremony that formed part of the 'sacred medicine festival'. They all dressed up in white clothing and the student borrowed me a white skirt. The night had already fallen when we head of to the temple where the ceremony would take place, carrying mats and blankets. It was on walking distance. People from around the world as well as from Brazilian urban areas had joined the local participants on this ceremony that was guided by a Peruvian shaman and a Santo Daime 'mestre' that had brought along a range of attributes. *"Ritual in this context"*, Foutiou writes about a similar setting, *"is instrumental but not as something that reproduces social structure; rather it fosters self-transformation while at the same time challenging the participants' very cultural constructs and basic assumptions about the world"* (2010:5). The cultural blend characterizing the ceremony-setup as well as the participants, certainly added a challenge to 'constructs' alongside the workings of the tea.

The atmosphere was different from the previous ceremony. It was more organized and all the participants were to fill in and sign a form at the entrance, informing about health conditions and payment. Residents of the area could enter for free, but the amount of people on our host's 'guestlist' became an issue so that after some slightly unpleasant bargaining we could participate with a discount. Again the men were set at the one side and the women on the other, but this time in a circle as the temple was round. All of them were dressed in white. Some men were in uniform; black trousers, white blouse, black tie and a star-shaped pin on the chest. The ceremony started with an introduction of the organization and the leaders and we were asked to stay inside during the whole ceremony. Those who had not paid and signed the forms would not be given the tea and were asked to return to the entrance. "*Bom trabalho*", Sol wished me luck. Again there was the singing of hymns, the dancing from side to side and the rhythm accompanied by maracas. The songs were mostly emphasizing devotion. It has been commented that the founder of Santo Daime, 'Mestre Irineu', from African parents, received precise instructions on how to organize and practice his doctrine in an ayahuasca vision. Attracted by the rubber boom at the age of 20, he had travelled from the northeast of Brazil (Maranhao) to the state of Acre, where he came into contact with indigenous Amazonian groups (Labate and Pacheco, 2010). The experiences that

marked his life can still be found blended within Santo Daime ceremonies and the many hymns he 'received' and are still sung by his followers touch upon his journey. These hymns are by now complemented by many others and in these are "*contained counsel and instructions for members' conduct, and in them the Daimista worldview is expressed; they contain strong symbolic content, which gives form to the mystical experience of the psychoactive sacrament*" Labate and Pacheco write (2010:31). As this Santo-Daime ceremony continued (again for many hours), there were only few people holding hymn-booklets. Many seemed to know the hymns by heart, while a small number, including myself, were not able to sing along.

There were three specific moments on which participants were to stand in two rows (one of males, one of females) in front of the leaders' altar in order to receive a cup of tea. The tea was dark of colour and very bitter. Soon after my first cup I started to have trouble coordinating my feet. I looked around to see if this was happening to the others as well and for some at the opposite side of the circle this seemed to be the case. Suddenly the whole situation seemed hilarious to me. I could not manage to control my giggling and in order to respect instead of disrupting this ceremony I decided to go outside.

Some other people were coming out and then went back in shortly after. Sol came out and explained to me that people were just having some air, that it would be best for me to enter again as "*it can help you*". I told her that I couldn't as I thought it was too funny. "*Well, I guess funny is good*", she replied before entering again. At a following moment a traveller that was also hosted by Heather's came out. He crouched on his ankles near the temple, pressed his thumbs under his eyebrows and held his head down as if concentrating deeply. "*Todo bom*?" I asked him in a Bahian way. First there was no reaction. Then he looked up briefly with an absent expression. Without making any contact he sighted deeply as if collecting strength, stood up and walked back in. At this moment I remembered him telling me the day before, that he perceived ayahuasca as an individual experience.

One effect of the tea is held to be 'cleaning', mentally as well as physically. It helps people deal with unsolved issues and can also result in diarrhoea and vomiting that is regarded as purifying emotionally and physically. As time passed by, the toilet building at some distance from the temple got more and more crowded. Still in my role of researcher -and admittedly, a bit provocative in that of a joker- I started asking questions. Soon however, a lady from the organization came up to me. This was not a nice place for me to be hanging around, she said, and I realized that perhaps she was right. "*Ask them*", a young man with huge piercings directed me while lying on a reed mat and looking towards the sky. "*Ask the spirits*". I looked up and wondered how I would include the answers from the spirits in my research. In front of the temple a girl was lying down and crying desperately while others tried to comfort her. The shaman was walking in between the people, seemingly 'directing energies' with noises and fume that was coming from an a sacramental object he held in his hand.

Around a fireplace I continued my conversations. A man sat down next to me and his younger sister who was sitting one bench away joined us. Her face was decorated with orange indigenous paintings. "*She looks like a clown doesn't she*" the man laughed. We discussed the ceremony, the tea, the music and the visitors and as a joke he remarked "*I should have brought my I-pod*". We were hushed by a firmly looking woman with long grey hair. "*For us it's different*", he continued whispering. "*I'm trying to explain scientifically what goes on in my body, but for some people we are completely subordinated, that's why they're this serious*". The man had studied molecular science and was now working in this field. He and his sister had come from São Paolo to participate in the festival. They were staying at a hostel in the centre. The rest of the people around did not seem bothered by our talking. Some were smiling, some were singing along with the crowd inside the temple, others were listening and some looked a bit lost. "*To some people this is just a good excuse to be tripping*", he continued joking. "*But in the end it's all about vibrations*" he concluded. From that point on the conversation became an interaction of endless questioning and reasoning. When it got too hard for me to follow I decided to go home and sleep. Quite contrary to my previous experience with the tea, this time an intensely forceful and dead-end but unstoppable thinking was provoked that had exhausted me. I crossed Sol on her way to the toilet and we shared some words. While talking to me she mumbled a dutiful "*Viva*" along with the crowd inside the temple. The rest of the group was still inside. I said goodbye to Sol, sneaked into the temple to pick up the blanket I had borrowed -and that suddenly appeared too pink and flowery for the setting- and headed home. To be sure I asked a girl that was also about to leave, if she knew how to get to Heather's house. "*Go this way, stay left, breathe deeply and look around*", she replied cheerfully with her hand placed on my shoulder. I was more than happy to be following her advice.

The next day I remembered not having felt any fear, whereas it had been dark and snakes and spiders were not rare on that path. On the contrary, I might not have felt safer before. More strangely, I remembered having perceived the soil illuminating my way back. It seemed crazy to me, but not at all to the people around me. This site is famous for its illumination, they argued. My own reasoning was that the moon had been reflected by the bed of quartz crystals on which the site lies. We had now travelled with our hosts, Pie, Ali and Phill to Balea, a nearby community where Heather and Tom used to live. On our way we stopped the car several times to perceive eagles and parrots – perceived as presents of god, letting us know we were lucky - and salute cows that were posing scenically on a grassland. The site where we arrived was named after the shape of one of the hills, that of a whale. It was beautiful. In a valley between green hills, 7 families had settled. The families had their own colourful and extraordinary houses, but shared a big part of their time as well as meals. Small children were playing in and around a natural pool from which water was sourcing and it was hard to figure out which ones belonged to who. They appeared to me as eccentric little creatures, as little adults almost. The families had met several years before on ayahuasca ceremonies and decided to live together. That day, a big cake was shared to

celebrate the first birthday of a doll. When the evening came, adults and children gathered for a lenient ceremony with tea and music, but I decided to skip this one as to get some rest and digest my experiences from the previous days.

5.2.3 Recovering the soil

"We started to construct the community and to recover the environment that was very destructed by the fire. This was a place that caught fire a lot. These trees you see here weren't there yet. One of our jobs, besides community life, was to recover the ecology. Many years we worked a lot for agriculture and we never had anything. It was very difficult to manage because the land was poor due to many years of destruction. But also a little due to our lack of experience with the environment and agriculture, because we were all people from the city. So we came here to learn how to plant and how to relate to the local environment. We came to learn to construct, we constructed the houses. Actually our education was self-education, we learned everything from the start by doing the things" (Toni, Festina).

The communities from this case support a holistic worldview where ecology, health, education, personal expressions and spirituality are combined. The spirituality is characterized by its links to nature (the environment) and some refer to it as an 'ecumenical spirituality'; *"We like to explore a bit of every religion"*, Toni explained me. Within these views man is not regarded as separate from nature. Instead, if it wants to subsist, it has to regard itself as part of an interdependent system, similar to nutrient cycles in the soil. With the start-up of the communities came the task of interacting with one another and with the land in a new and yet to refine way. The soil called for recovery as it was often degraded by previous use, neglect or fires. The people felt the need to recover their relations with their surroundings as well as with oneself.

The knowledge to recover and produce resulted from many interactions and came from different directions. In social practices surrounding implemented technologies one can find combined 'modern', international knowledge with native knowledge. Where this fusion of knowledge in the socio-environmental practices of community members can either be seen as a reflex or as an 'active' reconsideration of previous experiences with modernity, it most probably is a combination of both. Few people arrive 'by chance' or through lack of seeing other options, whereas the considered aim of this knowledge assemblage (in technology, it's implementation and use) is sustainability, an aim resulting for a great share from a rethinking of modernities means and technologies.

The knowledge and technologies come from local and distant universities and environmental organizations, from local and distant (traveling) friends and following out of the practices of the residents. Various technologies of soil recovery and sustainable food production have been implemented and although the communities find themselves in varying phases of a process, these technologies can now be found functioning successfully. Alongside agro-ecology, agro-forestry and organic agriculture, permaculture is an important

concepts that can be found used and practiced here. On various communities this included ecological constructions, dry (rotating) toilets for compost, the use of local natural material, waste-reduction, efficient (renewable) energy use as well as managing to live together.

The concept of permaculture finds its origins in the 1970's when two Australians (Mollison and Holmgren) elaborated on previous related knowledge in their book '*Permaculture one'*. Permaculture stands for permanent agriculture as well as permanent culture which is highlighted in its main ethics: "*Earth care, People care and Fair shares*" (Whitefield, 1993:5). Fundamentally, the idea of permaculture is to create edible ecosystems. "*The aim is to use the power of the human brain, applied to design, to replace human brawn or fossil fuel energy and the pollution that goes with it*", Whitefield writes in an introduction to permaculture (1993:3). It is about "*designing sustainable human habitats*" (:4) and "*very much about taking matters into our own hands and about making changes in our lifestyles, rather than demanding that others do it for us*", he continues (Whitefield, 1993:5).

Scientific knowledge about beneficial cooperations that can be found between matter, organisms, in nature -referring to systems ecology- as well as recent technologies such as solar technology are combined with deep local, traditional and indigenous knowledge about local resources. "*Only by reconnecting ourselves with our local resources can we move towards a sustainable society*", Whitefield writes (1993:8). Based on this assemblage of knowledge on nature and durable production, productive and environmental functions of land are integrated and edible ecosystem are designed. A permaculture design can thus be seen as "*a way of putting components together for their maximum benefit*" (Whitefield, 1993:4). Such a system is able to provide a great diversity of outputs without the use of harmful inputs and without generating harmful effects. "*The design is based on the principle of making useful connections. This is what makes ecosystems work and it is also what makes permaculture systems work*", writes Whitefield (1993:3). The role and state of the human within this system is a crucial one. It has to make an intelligent (sustainable) design and in order to manage to do so it has to feel 'balanced' or capable, mentally as well as physically, for which it has to manage the relations or connections to its surroundings. Useful connections thus have to be made within as well as between human and non-human bodies and are continuously negotiated.

Permaculture resonates the thoughts of community members as it accentuates the beneficial effects of diversity as well as the idea of cooperation and sustainability as opposed to the modern emphasis on competition and growth. Furthermore, it acknowledges that "*nature is an active designer herself*" (Holmgren, 2011:93). This is recognized in practices by community members as well:

> "*We work a lot with technologies where the own vegetation is improving the fertility. So it's an environmental technology of understanding the plants and how each one can contribute to fertilizing the place. And with that we plant things to eat*" (Toni, Festina).

An abundance of *useful connections* and cooperation appeared to me as pieces of paradise on community land, all developed through human well-considered intervention. Through the years, residents, semi-residents and volunteers had gathered to gradually transform poor and degraded land into affluent green and productive food systems. Especially after some hours of cooperative planting, walking through such 'systems' did not leave me unstirred. It felt healthy and good to be surrounded by trees, plants, birds and butterflies while breathing fresh air and feeling the warmth of the sun on my skin. Walking here reminded me of wilderness, of a jungle, but a very tamed, safe and friendly one, as with each step I was surrounded by different colorful vegetation and provided with something 'exotic' and fresh to eat. A wide variety of fruits, vegetables, fibers and (medicinal) herbs could be found here.

One day I accompanied the girls of Festina into the 'garden' to collect '*urukum*'. On bushes not much higher than us, spiky pods (like chestnut shells) were opening up, showing us their crimson seeds inside. The pigment that these seeds provide has traditionally been used by indigenous people as decoration, repellent, protection from the sun and skin treatment. I remembered the orange pigment from the community of the first case, where Ali had decorated the faces of the eco-camp visitors after a daytrip to the waterfalls. And I remembered them from Goiás, where the visitors of shamanic rituals also had their faces decorated with it and children wore a dot between their eyes to protect them from 'harmful looks' of adults. We collected them for other reasons. With their scarce clothing, long dark hair and baskets on their heads, the Festina girls fitted the green surroundings like a painting. "*They are very organic*", the boys would comment. During the weekly reunion of the community –the moment on which past and future activities are discussed- we were removing the seeds from its shells. After sun drying and grinding, it serves to condiment (and color) meals. The powder was collected in a jar and placed with the many other jars filled with to me unfamiliar seasoning straight from the garden. By the time the reunion was over, most had their faces decorated.

Little issues arising in the community, that came to the fore in the reunions as well as in small conversations, acts and attitudes, were in essence not radically different from the issues that arise outside of the community. They relate to personalities, emotions like fear and greed and the expression of bad words about one another. The main issue seemed to be the fear of working more or less than the other and receiving more or less than the other (be it outputs or credits). "*The same that you have in a family. Between brothers*", Toni could summarize the community conflicts. The main difference with 'the outside world' is that a reflection on society and a disapproval of certain rules of modernity has already occurred. As members decided to live in community with shared values, issues that arise are detected with more sensitivity and subtly dealt with. A resident of the cacao farm described how he got to know the people with whom he previously started a community;

" We found out that although we had similar values, we had very different characters. It was all black and white. So we worked with that, used it as an opportunity and achieved great things".

Issues need to be confronted and resolved in order to continue and personal responsibility is easily experienced. The process of resolving issues forms part of recovering the soil;

"If some conflict arises that has to do with what we're working on, we talk all the little things out during the weekly reunion and we try to find a solution. We already had reunions were we sit down and only discuss our emotions. Without talking about work, but what we feel. Sometimes we call someone from outside to help us, doing some job. But this is only when the situation is a bit more serious. From day to day, everything is ok. The best thing is, when a conflict arises, that the two people involved try to resolve it between them so there's no need for the whole community to be involved. The community will get involved when his doesn't have a solution and doesn't' have a solution. Then it delays and starts to bother the communal harmony. Then we need to sit down because the two people didn't manage to resolve the issue" (Toni, Festina).

Arising issues can be taken more seriously in communities with a more rooted 'core' of residents. For the visitors and semi-residents, the option to 'escape' problems is better perceived. In Goiás, a certain hastiness characterized the visitors. Conflicts were dealt with either by ignoring them, by 'sending love' or by disappearing. However, the tea helped them to deal with conflicts internally, dissolving also conflicts that arise between people. Furthermore, as people travel they adapt and bring along certain values on their way. As a resident of the cacao farm mentioned to me;

"I think 300 to 400 international young people passed by. Often coming for a week or two and ending up staying two or three months. They discover all the values and the way of life, that you can live without a fridge and without your car and without electricity".

So even if they are just visitors or semi-residents without much plans to stay, they carry in ideas and as they carry on their journey, they have picked up some lessons and reshaped their knowledge. Much of such travelers end up starting their own community.

5.2.4 The environmentalist network

When we look at the knowledge that is brought in and obtained in these communities, we find an interesting global/local blend resulting from previous interactions between the members and their environments. The communities are all but isolated from the world, but the world to which they connect is an alternative one and could be called an environmentalist network. As mentioned, these communities are linked to one another through physical visits (to and from the other communities) and through various encounters at festivals for alternative communities. Physically and 'digitally' they are also linked to environmental organizations. This adds to their sustainable, international and dynamic

character. First of all, the communities receive friends, friends of friends and volunteers from all distances that participate in daily life and help out with agricultural activities. Most visitors arrived at the communities through word of mouth as they are traveling. The cacao farm also receives international volunteers through its membership of Wwoof.org. The eco-village is less attractive for low budget-travellers, and the visitors that join the residents are therefore mostly individuals and families with better financial means from Brazil as well as other (mainly developed) countries. The communities involved in permaculture have worked on partnerships with local, national and international permaculture institutes in order to exchange practical and theoretical knowledge, to increase their network of sustainable opportunities and sporadically to receive funding.

Photo page case 2

5.2 Liquid matter

Picture 5.2.1: Preparing ayahuasca with "*bom pensamento*"

Picture 5.2.2: Greeting the non-human scenery, Goiás

Liquid matter

Picture 5.2.3: Blend of belief systems, Goiás

Picture 5.2.3: Dry rotating toilet, 'cagador, festina

5.2.5 Summary

Whereas the consumers of ayahuasca reveal their agency in the practices of preparation and consumption as well as in the creation of meaning attached to these matters, the brew engages with matter in the body as an assemblage. The alliances formed within the body are able to transform the brain chemistry in a way that radically alters the conditions of the mind and affects the consciousness. The agency of this matter can be experienced and therewith interpreted in multiple ways. Interpretations can be found expressed within the various (institutionalized) types of ceremonies where a blend of Indigenous, African, Christian as well as Western/modern worldviews is present. The technologies such as from permaculture comprise of a set of knowledge-systems that are reflexive on the outcomes of modernity. They are related to sustainability and drawn from different times and places. In the communities, knowledge on means of relating, producing and consuming as captured in sustainable technologies is shared among residents, visitors and travellers.

5.3 Land matters

Without much doubt, land is the central matter for the biggest rural workers movement of Brazil, the *Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra* (MST). Reflecting upon the neo-liberalism scenery, this movement struggles for a land reform that necessarily implies social, political and environmental transformations. As to achieve these goals, the MST occupies the land, organizes on the land and cultivates the land following the movements political ideology as well as the individual experiences of its members.

Of the two communities where research was conducted for this case, one is an encampment and the other one a settlement. As to provide an image and understanding of the social and environmental responses to modernity, the backgrounds, worldviews and practices of the encountered movement members will come to the fore. The responses are practices of reflexive values and knowledge which are co-shaped by the central matter of land and its associated meaning. This meaning is negotiated on the level of the settlements and camps as well as on regional and national encounters. Furthermore, interaction with foreign organizations and individuals is of influence to the creation of meaning and knowledge within the movement, the communities and within individual settlers, resonating in turn in practices.

To start with, an image will be drawn of what the movement stands for by focusing on the historical role and meaning of land in Brazil as well as the current meaning that leading figures and individual members of the movement attach to it. Following, the practices that occur on the land will be described. Once the land is occupied or seized, the community members organize in reunions, land is cultivated and happenings are celebrated. An exploration of the ties that the movement holds with organizations locally, nationally and internationally, whose ideas form assemblages with the movement that resonate in practices, will conclude this chapter.

5.3.1 Politicised land

Since 1984, The '*Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra*' is struggling for land reform from a Marxist perspective. The apparent success of this movement has inspired and fascinated many, above all small-scale farmers, activists and academics. Since its initiation, a lot has been written about their struggles for land. Within no-time the MST achieved to reach an estimated number of one and a half million members and is seen as "*one of the most important and long-lasting grassroots movements for land reform in world history*" (Carter, 2009:1). Vergara-Camus (2009) argues that the success of the movement can be attributed in the first place to its '*relative autonomous communities*' with '*autonomous political structures that facilitate mobilization*'. Furthermore, "*education to eliminate not only illiteracy but also the technological gap and political misinformation is a priority of the MST's land reform program*" (Martins, 2000:39).

Today they also maintain friendly ties with organizations and support groups in Brazil as well as other countries of the world.

A long history of peasants struggles has preceded the formation of the MST. A look at the historical access to -or distribution of- land is helpful to place the current situation, concerning the meaning that the MST has attached to land, in perspective. Conflicts over land in Brazil can be traced back probably even before the new orders of colonization. With the arrival of the Portuguese in the 1500s however, the struggle for land gained a new character. The core and hierarchically institutionalized ideas of economic development that the colonizers brought along came to be at the basis of resistance and oppressions. The colonizers established an elite known by the name '15 capitanias hereditárias', that were enabled by the king to distribute land for people to use (Cardoso, 1997). Many confrontations with the marginalized population regarding land were to follow ever since. In the early 17th century, free communities of (ex)slaves that came to be known as 'quilombos' were organized, which "*were often attacked by governmental forces or popular militias led by powerful landowners*", according to Caldeira (2008:150). Movements as such were endangering the pace and direction of development that state officials had in mind (Caldeira, 2008), yet with the oppressions the struggle for land continued. In Bahia of the 19th century, ex-slaves and landless people organized as '*the canudos rebellion*' (Caldeira, 2008). In the subsequent century, expelled agricultural workers in the northeast staged as '*cangaços'* (social banditry) for the occupation of landlord properties in order to challenge their power and influence (Caldeira, 2008). Later on in the 20th century '*Peasant Leagues'* were formed to resist land expropriations and to pressure land reform (Caldeira, 2008).

Under military rule, Brazil was among the Latin-American countries characterized by a very dominant state, rigorous restrictions on political and civil rights and no competitive elections (Held et al., 1999). Powerful landowners, supported by governmental forces, were often at the head of operations to evacuate occupations. Inequality in power/access to land and the dominating view of land as primarily commercially profitable –as it was first accentuated by the 1850 'Lei de Terras' (Morissawa, 2001), the law of land- have served as main motives for the formation and means of the MST. The disproportional power and therewith access to resources originally held by governmental leaders, landlords and popular militias played a central role, and continues to play a central role, in the mobilization as well as organization of the movement (Caldeira, 2008).

During the times of formation of the movement, many isolated land struggles were already occurring in different states, all with their own leaders. The CTP, a religiously based social movement supporting peasant rights, started organizing meetings between the different leaderships. It was from these meetings in the beginning of the 80s, attended by representatives of several states, unions and associations, that the first national meeting of the MST was to follow. Gradually, an organizational structure was created resulting from the

lived experiences and reflections of the movement (Wolford, 2003). The movement's struggle for a redistribution of land is centrally *"based on the right to property for those who work it"* or *"land for small farmers to work"* (Baletti et al., 2008:310). But this *"new massive and radical land reform proposal"* as Martins writes, *"is not simply land redistribution to incorporate more farmers into the capitalist system but involves shifting the entire agrarian structure: production, power, and cultural relations. It means that the whole economic-social-political system is going to be changed"* (Martins, 2000:36).

The community members I encountered came from different regions of Brazil and their stories revealed many different backgrounds. While some are previous owners of a piece of land, many have been working on the land for a landlord or spend their days in industrial wage-labour as farmers-decedents. A few members even hold no memory of a rural life at all, but fancy the idea of having a piece of land, being part of a movement and/or receiving some form of education.

What their experiences have in common are harsh conditions; from feeling forced to leave ones land, vainly searching for a job in the city or working for a boss under bad conditions (making very long days, performing repetitive tasks, being underpaid and treated without much respect) to even worse situations. Besides a shared craving for a more comfortable situation, the members are quite different and often don't know one another before joining the struggle.

In order to consider themselves as part of the community and movement, Wolford (2003) argues, they have to imagine a future beyond what they have experienced. MST activists and leaders – that following the MST principles should rather be referred to as representatives- in particular are there to guide such imaginations. They play an active and important role in the creation of meaning and networks and they intend to *"unify the social movement by articulating private beliefs, interpretations and preferences into shared values and meanings"* (Caldeira, 2008:abstract). But this 'framing' by leaders is not without tension: *"To the leaders' mythologized idea of rural community, settlers oppose their memories of a countryside where survival was made so difficult that they were driven to migrate. Joining the MST and returning to the countryside implies for these settlers the individual possession of land"* (Caldeira, 2008:159). With the experience of marginalization, they imagine having a piece of land of their own and don't directly think of sharing it with other, yet unknown families. The movement confronts them with the role of capitalism that with its incorporated views on (private) property has led to their marginalization. This is a negotiation process that takes place throughout different social practices of the movement.

In the first place, it are active MST members that contribute to the inclusion of new members by inviting people that qualify to join a meeting. In this '*trabalho de base*' new members are informed about the aims of the movement and the benefits that participation could bring

them. Often it is the wish for a piece of land that interest newcomer as the movement provides a "*concrete alternative for poor families in the countryside and the cities*" (Vergara-Camus, 2009: 179). Through meetings, they are included in the group and in the movement. Using all kinds of means, the new member is than provided with the political ideology that the movement attaches to land. Besides these meetings, occupations as well as celebrations are important events that contribute to the co-creation and maintenance of meaning attached to the land and therewith to feelings of inclusion. Being actively involved in a movement increases one's feeling of trust and belonging and vice versa (Putnam, 1995), facilitating cooperation.

Once members have achieved the first goal of access to land, the level of participation has to be maintained. There still have to be some forms of success to preserve trust and cooperation. "*MST members who have satisfied their initial need for land need to be convinced of a reason to remain active in the movement, or many will cease to participate*", Wolford (2003:501) writes. According to Wolford this participation is maintained through the active creation of 'symbols, slogans and rituals'. The red t-shirts and caps, the monthly MST journal, their logo, posters, flags, marches, celebrations, occupation rituals and socio-political events including songs and theatre are the main examples. The socio-political celebrations called 'místicas', emphasize on "*humility, honesty, conviction, perseverance, sacrifice, gratitude, responsibility and discipline*" (Wolford, 2003:510), values that can be found originating in leftist ideologies as well as popular Christian theology, probably since land reform has received support from the communist party as well as the Catholic church (Caldeira, 2008). By constantly emphasizing on the movements ideas, ideals, benefits and principles, the land takes a central role in the creation of 'imagined communities', which is what keeps the movement progressing together.

As mentioned, the meaning that individual members attach to the land differs to the meaning already formulated by the movement, to which leader figures significantly contribute. The differences in meaning off course hold hands with different experiences. For some members, being part of the movement seems more relevant than owning land. This goes up in particular for members that have long lost their connection to the land and/or have no experience in working the land. One of the encampment residents for example, spend his time working in the industry. He joined the MST after he had encountered the movement in action near his home-town. When telling me how they were recently expelled from the *fazenda* he said;

> "*We partied for three days here alongside the road and people were asking us 'you just got expelled, what are you celebrating?' I say to those people that it's worth it to be part of the MST. Because you are not just fighting for your own dreams, but the dream of a lot of people. And besides, I wouldn't want land right now, I want to help in the struggle. It's worth it*" (Bobinho, MST encampment).

This shows that the land is seen as something worth fighting for, but meanwhile the process of achieving the land is at least as important as achieving it since it is able to provide the member with a sense of belonging. In the movement he found some rest, a purpose and good company. For many of the older members the land also means rest. They have often experienced the busy and noisy city and are happy to be able to return to the countryside to which they have many memories. They know what it is to live on the countryside, what to expect from the land as well as from themselves in relation to the land. They know it is hard work, but also know to appreciate this kind of life. To most of the younger members, the land has yet a different meaning. As they often have no experience with working the land, they perceive it as pretty but boring and they miss the vibrant life and opportunities of the city. Students that are attracted by the movement often have no practical experience with agriculture, but are willing to generate this. They are aware of the potentials of the countryside and have the will to support the communities with their academic knowledge on sustainable production.

For the movement (leaders) land thus means something else than for its individual members. For landlords and government officials, land has yet another meaning, since their practices (experiences) in relation to land differ. But all these meanings can be found working into the land. These meanings shape, reduce, enrich and therewith transform the 'vibrancy' of the land. Subsequently, this politicized land impacts the lives of the community residents significantly. This is illustrated by a statement of a settler;

> *"The people struggling for this reform end up in more misery, because the government neglects us. It's worse, when you try to produce something, we're not allowed. We can't do anything close to the watersheds. Where there's no water it's not possible to produce. This complicates our lives. We can't even grow our own food. It means we live on the countryside but have to buy everything in the city" (Don Marco, MST settlement).*

With doubtful intentions the government here has implemented an environmental policy, which states that watersheds should be forested in order to guard the quality of the water and the soil. This way it has given meaning to a piece of land, impacting the life of this family. Paradoxically, this family then has to buy cheap food in the city that is produced in an environmentally unsustainable way. The land on which these ingredients are grown has a radically different character than the land near the watershed. The practices surrounding this land are also different. Different technologies are used, different matter interacts with the soil. Different meaning is given to this land. The composition and potency of this land is different, it has a different 'vibrancy'.

When it comes to the organization and the social practices of the movement, both the negotiated meaning attached to the land as the land itself are thus at work. When agreement exists on the (economic, political, practical and emotional) significance of the land, more trust, unity and cooperation is perceived. However, when promises related to the political

meaning of the land are not kept, individual members lose hope and trust and (re)focus on the individual and practical meaning that the land has to them. The land is to provide them with healthy food and perhaps a little income. The meaning which is in that case attached to the land by members in the first place comes down to improving the quality of their life and that of their family members.

5.3.2 Living land

Despite of this internal difference in priorities between settlers and leaders, Caldeira (2008) argues, they mutually benefit and manage to face the same direction as a movement. At the same time of being involved in land reform, the movement is "*developing radical new forms of grassroots democracy, environmental care and co-operative production*", McCowan writes (2003:1). Occupations, reunions, agricultural production and festivities are central practices of social organization and production that occur on and around the land.

These practices tend to fit into a movement model of radical democracy, in which decisions are made collectively from the grassroots level upwards and leadership is elected, decentralized, rotating and horizontal. To realize their head goals of agricultural reform and the social reform that this requires, responsibilities and tasks are divided within the settlements and camps. Every settlement or camp has its '*nucleos'*, groups that are formed by 10 to 30 families. Within these the main tasks, divided by themes, are organized. These themes include alimentation, health, hygiene, education, religion, finances and leisure and for each theme a smaller group meets frequently to plan and analyse activities. Two representatives – ideally one women and one man- of every *nucleo*, represent the families at community meetings as well as at regional meetings where they elect representatives at state level. A general coordination organ of representatives serves to guard that the work of these different small groups is in a way united. It is also responsible for managing big actions, for negotiations with the government and for relating to 'external' society (Morissawa, 2001). Following Baletti et al., leadership within the movement should be seen as "o*rganic leadership from the grassroots; cultivated in occupations and through prior political activism*" (2008:310). She further states that "*leadership in the movement is carefully structured to be as horizontal as possible and all offices are, in principle, occupied temporarily. All participants in national level decision making are selected on a rotating basis or are elected by the members of their communities. Through this ideal of equality, members across the country are encouraged to feel kinship with, and pride in, their unknown but imagined companheiros (comrades)*" (2003:507). This type of organization guards that 'leaders' are not alienated from the land and the reality of the families. It guarantees also that people get together on a regular basis to evaluate proceedings, exchange information, discuss directions and feel united as a community and as a movement.

The social practices that take place on the land intertwine with this model. When the land of a large property owner is found to be unproductive, members from all around gather, organized with flags and in gear, and settle on this property. This process is referred to as '*festa*' by the movement (Martins, 2000) and "*has a special meaning for the landless themselves. The decision to settle on and seize a private property, not an easy one, requires maturity, cohesion, discipline, and hope*", Martins writes (2000:37). The land occupations are "*massive and continuous*" as to pressure the INCRA, the state organ responsible for implementing agrarian reform (Martins: 2000:37). Interestingly, Martins also writes that "*this direct action turns "passive" peasants into powerful actors fighting for land and political participation. They now call themselves "free workers". They recover the capacity to create material and cultural commodities denied to them by both the traditional latifundium and the modern agribusiness complex, where they are "workers for capital""* (Martins, 2000:37). It often represents a turning point in the lives of these people. What they have been suffering they have now decided to resist. Sharing this feeling with many other families turns this happening into a very emotional one.

Land that is being owned without serving a social function, is formulated as against law (Caldeira, 2008). At that point the INCRA comes in. It "*oversees all of the juridical, technical, and administrative aspects of agrarian reform*" and its employees can be viewed as "*the state's conduit to the landless rural poor, the most impoverished, most marginalised population in Brazil*" (Wolford, 2010:96). They probe the situation after which negotiations start. The INCRA can bargain with the property owner, buy the property and hand it over to the movement. It can take the INCRA up to years to negotiate and make decisions. More often than not, it does not manage to reach agreements and the occupying members are expelled. This occurred to the encampment Dênis, that consequently moved its huts and people to the side of the road that is regarded as no-one's property. Here, they continue daily life that next to the domestic tasks involves reunions, gardening, celebrations and waiting for news from the INCRA.

Where the reunion serve to make decisions and safeguard participation, several other events are able to underline the importance of the movement and the sense of belonging to the movement through activities that bring about collective joy. From collectively drinking *pinga* and spontaneously bringing up memories of community experiences after the Friday reunions, to the well-organized '*misticas*', where through all kinds of performances, the memories of the movement are brought up, provoking shared sentiments among the audience. The *misticas* take place during encounters of various days, of which each day stands in the light of a different topic. Debates and discussions are held on what goes on in the world, in Brazil as well as in the movement, being of inspiration to the imagination of members that are to create the performances. Light is shed on inherited memories that refer to revolutionary historical figures fighting against injustice and the exploitation of rural workers. They include community leaders that lost their lives in confrontations but also figures as Che Guevara, Marx and Lenin (Wolford, 2003). In the words of Wolford, "*explicit ties to past resistance contextualizes participation in the movement, investing the presence with a rich*

legacy" (2003:518). The *mistica* represents all that the movement stands for and involves poems, speeches, mimic, songs and theatre. It are means through which the ideology and values of the movement are explicitly recalled: companionship, solidarity, humility, courage. Besides the historical political ideology, 'newer' developments are also represented. As the movement stands for healthy food and counters the use of chemicals in agriculture as well as the production of GMO's, environmental themes as such are also absorbed in the *misticas*. The 'good', that what liberates –occupations, companionship, knowledge, consciousness- is each time opposed to the 'bad', that what dominates, oppresses, capitalism. The encounter that normally takes up to four days is concluded with a party. Music, drinks and food are there to facilitate the strengthening of fraternization.

5.3.3 Arroz e feijão

The ideology of the movement, its ideas, its values, are thus actively and cooperatively reproduced and emphasized in a diversity of social practices that seize a significant share of the settlers time. These are events that bring about new experiences and knowledge that the members embody and take along with them when returning to their encampment or settlement. Meanwhile, the land, the tangible goal of the *luta*, is there to interact with and become productive. The residents of the encampment gazed at the land with mixed feelings. They were producing quite some things at the adjoining property when they were expelled. The soil wasn't very fertile from the start, but they managed to produce, eat from the land and even bring some things by bike to friends and to the city to sell. Now they had small patches of collective land that they could have to leave behind on any moment. It was temporary land. surprisingly, neat rows of salad, *cebolinha*, spring onions, cabbage and banana's flaunted in front of their huts. On the path from one plot to the other a *maracujá* plant was growing with passion fruits similar to charismas decoration.

It became clear that some of the residents had more energy to be gardening than others, but this wasn't seen as much of a problem. Anyway it wasn't enough to keep everyone busy, nor for everyone to eat from. And there were other worries too, which were shared as in a family. Visitors brought food to the community. These are friends of the residents and members that have a house and a job nearby. The families still camping represent much more families that were on the *fazenda* occupation. Some of these families come to bring provision and company to make the evenings and weekends much more lively and cheerful. Time was taken to prepare the dishes, in amounts for the hungry. *Arroz e feijão* -rice and beans- were always present. '*Tem que ter*' they said, it has to be there, it's the national dish. The dark beans are cooked in a special pan for some time until they partly dissolve and it becomes like a bean sauce. Aside from this dish, there are vegetables from the plot or brought along by the visitors and semi-residents. The nearby river provides them with fish. Meat is consumed in small amounts unless there is a special occasion.

At Franka things were different. *"Through democratic structures of decision making settlements may vary in form from family basis to collective possession, depending on the workers' experience, the quality of the soil, the kind of crops, the market structure, and many other factors"*, Martins writes (2000:35). The families at Franka have their own property, their own plots and their own activities. They have obtained the land but found it not enough to live from. Some lack experience and skills, most lack actual resources. Without support from friends or family working in the city it was difficult to have your live here, I was told. But while complains went about condition being hard and the government neglecting them, most families had their fruits and vegetables growing.

There was quite some interaction between the families as they meet regularly in reunions and pass by one another's houses for a chat. They know what is going on in the lives of the others and support one another when possible. At the moment they feel as if they cannot offer the other help that is needed due to their private circumstances, or they feel that they are not receiving the respect and support that they need, trust declines, gossips arise and the unity tends to dissolve. Residents spoke about other settlements where there was much more unity. There they had a well functioning cooperative, shared land and technologies and a high production. For this community, plans as such were for the future as they currently lacked basic resources. The regional leader living at this settlement seemed to be having a hard time in gaining access to resources, politicizing, keeping the residents happy, buying provision for those in need and at the same time maintaining his family. One of the residents that was invited to receive an education within the movement complained. He ran out of gas and new gas was promised but didn't come. Fresh food was scarce for him as he was just starting to work the land. There were some fruit-trees and banana plants as well as spring onions that he had just planted. He was welcomed to collect some vegetables in the garden of a neighbour.

Students supporting the movement joined reunions in which they negotiated on 'new' sustainable production methods and community projects started to develop. *"The participatory planning process is influenced by the families' previous experiences, regional and ecological differences, and access to material conditions of production such as credit, technology, and training"* Martins writes (2000:38). In the meetings on the settlement there was some scepticism in the air due to previous experiences of the residents and they wondered if this would work, but during my stay things were coming from the ground. Individuals from different families had been cutting bamboo for the new chicken-run.

What surprised me is what Delgado (2008:abstract) has also found in her research; the movement is *"in a process of turning towards environmentalism"*. She found that it *"has adopted agro-ecology, a democratically oriented knowledge field"* (2008:abstract). Additional to agro-ecology, permaculture and organic agriculture were (interlinked) topics within these communities. It are the involved students from the surrounding cities as well as the MST

members that received an education within the movement that play a central role in introducing these concepts and practices. The settlers I spoke with showed a great sense of respect to the environment. The use of any chemicals is strongly discouraged by the movement, but are also beyond reach for most residents. The introduced sustainable technologies comprises 'traditional' peasant knowledge to which some settlers can identify, as well as some theories that are new to them. These new technologies comprised of different knowledge systems aim at autonomous, independent production while emphasizing diversity, cooperation and solidarity, which are reasons for the movement to implement them on their lands. For the settlers it is a solution as little external resources are needed for their implementation and maintenance and they themselves can do it with some help and explanation from the students, as the soil and vegetation might differs from the soil and vegetation they are familiar with.

5.3.4   The activist network

The thoughts and practices of community members are shaped in relation to the land, its vitality and attributed meanings and in relation to their fellow members, leaders, the students and a variety of visitors. Interactions take place on the encampments and settlements and on the various encounters. Additional partnerships are also aiding the development of the movement. The movement holds *"ongoing relationships with various actors locally, nationally, and internationally"* (Vergara-Camus, 2009: 179). The leaders play an important role as mediators between the state and the members, but also in maintaining relations with solidarity groups that provide them with mental, physical, financial or material support such as organic and native seeds. Through reciprocity, the members are able to alleviate the effects of the markets and reduce the impacts of state neglect; *"the university always gave good support. The municipality only comes when they need votes"* one of the settler argued.

During my stay, there was quite some talking about a young member that had received a scholarship to study agriculture in Venezuela. It was mentioned as an opportunity that had followed from a partnership between the Venezuela government and the movement. The movement furthermore participates in and receives support from transnational peasant networks as Via Campesina (for food sovereignty) and from smaller social and environmental movements who they join and that join them in protests, manifestations and other events. Recently the movement has send members to Haiti in the light of a solidarity exchange program with small farmers on agricultural and technical cooperation. The movement furthermore interacts with the CONCRAB –the National Confederation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Brazil- that *"was created by a network of land reform cooperatives in 1994"* and can be seen as *"the "economic arm" of the MST, supporting its social and*

political mobilizations" (Martins, 2000:39). Baletti et al. (2008) write that the movement has supported similar peasant struggles in South Africa by sending activists as well as by hosting leaders of South African movements in Brazil. The maintenance of such networks reveals the practice of the movements fundamental values; solidarity, autonomy and social justice (Martins, 2000). But it should by no means be seen as a linear process with a cause and effect. It are alliances that are made in which experiences are exchanged and that mutually help, influence and transform one another's thoughts and practices.

Photo page case three

5.3 Land matters

Picture 5.3.1: Negotiated meanings, settlement

Picture 5.3.2: Memories, MST

Land matters

Picture 5.3.3: Reflexive knowledge, encampment

Picture 5.3.3: Partnerships MST

5.3.5   Summary

The meaning attached to land is actively and collectively created within the communities forming part of the movement, a movement forming part of and participating in wider national and international society. Experiences and ideas are exchanged on many levels. Once part of the movement, the political struggle attached to the land becomes a central issue in the practices of the members. When the land is occupied, members wait for the political process resulting in either the clearing of the camp, or the right to stay, construct houses and cultivate. As it can take up to years to actually receive permission to the land and construct houses, the working of the land starts already on the encampments. Some of the members focus more on politics, some more on the *luta*, some on cultivating the land while a few are strongly attracted by the bottle, but together the movement moves forwards. The implemented knowledge comes from diverse but critical directions as the movement tends to avoid dependency on NGO or governmental aids. Instead, they enter into solidarity alliances with students, activists, other national, transnational and international social movements and foreign visitors of their communities that are interested in the movement. These are groups and individuals that support their cause for social justice, environmental justice or both. All these interactions, including the interaction with the land, co-shape meanings and develop knowledge as well as the practices on the land. "*The concept of collective working and living is the core of the MST strategy for developing sustainable acts of resistance in the settlements*", Martins (2000:38) helps me summarize.

6. Conclusions

> *"The state is a special organ whose responsibility is to work out certain representations which hold good for the collectivity. These representations are distinguished from the other collective representations by their higher degree of consciousness and reflection"* (Durkheim, 1957:50).

This higher degree of consciousness and reflection has meanwhile been dwindled by the increased power of corporations. The communities of the studied cases are representing themselves by taking over this task and taking responsibility on a lower scale of organization, namely 'the community' and the individual self.

Modernity, to be understood as the social relations and institutions brought about in the scene of a globalized neo-liberal development program, is increasingly characterized by the risks it simultaneously brings about and is plagued by. Due to the global, interdependent and complex character of today's world, modernity's longstanding institutions like states and markets are experiencing difficulties in dissolving social and environmental risks. This research has therefore been focused on the reflexive practices of semi-autonomous grassroots initiatives in rural Brazil. The reflexive practices of the community members have been studied to get a better idea on how the members of these communities relate to their human and non-human environment, how they organize and produce, but most of all with eyes on the future; How can we deal with the issues of modernity? Do these initiatives provide challenges or lessons to our modern institutions? And what can they teach us about our own 'modern' institutions and practices? More specifically:

 "How do reflexive rural communities in Brazil respond to contemporary social and environmental risks and how can their practices challenge the boundaries of modern institutions?"

To answer this question I have first of all focused on the outcomes generated by modernity as approached by Beck as risks (1999). Subsequently, I have treated the worldviews of community members by introducing them in their spaces and focusing on their socio-environmental practices in relation to vibrant matter. Thirdly, I have analyzed the nature of their reflexivity and institutional boundaries as to see where these can challenge the boundaries of modern institutions.

What is found is that the studied communities and their members carry a knowledge that is critical towards the knowledge that modernity has generated. Flawed elements on relating and producing are reconsidered and reconsiderations are expressed. The reflexive knowledge is a result of many previous experiences, interactions through time and space. Following Bauman (2000), interactions in a 'liquid modernity' are increasingly frequent and

hasty, turning identities and lifestyles to be less static and predictable. Individuals surrounding and trespassing the cores of the communities, mainly young visitors, travelers, students and volunteers, are on the one hand characterized by a search for something. Yet they find a sense of belonging within the places they visit as their search surrounds more sustainable and satisfying means of living. These rotating members add to the 'membrane-like' (Bennett, 2010) character of the institutional boundaries of the communities as their values interact with those of the core members in practices.

This research on reflexive rural communities demonstrates that within such modernity-critical groups, social and environmental risks –that remain or arise- are subtly detected in interactions and acted upon with more care in order to resolve them. The shared goals of its members are in fact to restore their relationship with one another and the environment. In terms of social norms and values, it is exactly these shared goals through which emphasis is put on what binds people rather than on what separates them.

The shared goals are to look for fair means of production and adequate ways to deal with social and environmental waste, for it to become vital rather than a risk. The consequences of neglecting social and environmental issues when they arise, will directly be felt within the community. Once modernity has been rejected or the absence of its governing institutions' responsibility and accountability is felt, responsibility and accountability comes down to the community and its individual members. There's less possibility and urge to flee, to hide and to regard abnormal things as normal. Negative outcomes of neglecting issues that arise, will be experienced directly and as a consequence, there is also less room for taking ones hands off and passing on responsibility.

Different forces brought community members together, but what binds them are shared experiences, shared practices surrounding and interacting with the same matter. Their practices connect to nature and are multiple expressions of autonomy, solidarity, cooperation and celebration. The newly embodied knowledge is practiced in interaction with the human and the nonhuman, to which meaning is attributed and from which meaning arises. The used examples of such 'nonhuman' matter are food, land and tea as the manufactured character of these matters is comprehensible. But also policies and technologies are good at shaping our thoughts and practices. In their policies and technologies, the communities take the vitality of nature into account as part of a 'bigger system'. Within the different negotiated and transforming 'membrane-like' institutional boundaries of the communities and the members, social and ecological diversity is embraced and celebrated around the dinner table, sustainable technologies, rituals and festivals.

Naturally, nothing exists in a vacuum. Everything is interlinked, and the members of these communities are therefore not isolated from the rest of society nor in constant perfect harmony. They are in a related process of recreating meaning, conceptions and practices and

this in turn brings along some internal struggles. In practice, consensus has to be attained on theory in order for theory to guide practices. Knowledge comes from different times and spaces and is processed into 'new' technologies, technologies that require knowledge on nature or 'the vibrancy of things' to be used. Discrepancies result in questions such as 'how do we break with existing institutions', 'what new institutions will we construct' and 'how do we keep it together and make it work'. Such processes always concern issues of individual freedom and control. They concern the ego and deal with issues of property and responsibility -division of labor- and dependency, on nature and one another as on governmental bodies. Such issues are subtly dealt with in interaction with oneself and the surroundings through inspection and conversation.

7. Discussion

Modernity is at risk due to its linear view on progress in which matter is seen as solid entities and emphasis is put on competition. But boundaries are not solid. Dualities as 'me and nature' or 'us and them' aren't real. Rather, all entities have agency, a special vitality, and form alliances, partnerships, cooperations that increase the vitality of each and together they transform. With our imagination we can come to realize that not recognizing this leads to risks. A plastic doll conceived as solid waste can end up with other pieces of plastic to form an island in the ocean. But it won't stay there passively. The island ends up having its impact on plankton and other ocean life and –as with chemicals in agriculture- will end up affecting us as well.

If this agency was really taken into account, the plastic doll might have never been consumed and never been produced. Industrialized food wouldn't be consumed and wouldn't be produced as it would be common sense that it would affect us. In the west, we are now becoming aware of these things and are slowly adjusting our consumption and production practices and policies. But what is often lacking is direct confrontation, experience with these matters in practice. As consumption and production have become distant from one another, it is easy to blame 'the other' instead of taking responsibility for once own social and environmental waste. And it is hard to blame oneself. But if the agency of things was really taken into account, debates about who is responsible would become irrelevant. Meanwhile we are busy with other things, such as identities, politics, science, the firm and the family. As our practices surround different matters, such as machines and money, we tend to forget or substitute what it really is all about.

Looking at some households we can see that our common sense is not gone. Here we find room plants, pets and children. Here there is sharing, laughter and joy. And when the child says "look what Klaas does!" after hanging a 'teddy mouse' upside down on doorknobs, the child is approached with admiration and love rather than judgments and rejection, as to her it is real. It is what her dear Klaas does.

8. References

- Arce A. (2009). State policy intervention in an era of civic participation, In: *Rural Transformations and Policy Intervention: China and Beyond*, Long N, Jingzhong Y (eds). Edward Elgar: Cheltenham & Camberley, UK, Northampton.

- Baletti, B., Johnson, T. M. and Wolford, W. (2008). Late Mobilization: Transnational Peasant Networks and Grassroots Organizing in Brazil and South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change, Vol. 8, No. 2 and 3, pp. 290–314*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Polity Press

- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Liquid times: living in an age of uncertainty*. Polity Press.

- Bauman, Z. (2012). Interview De volkskrant, 04-02-2012. Het vervolg page 7, by Peter Giesen

- Beck, U., Giddens, A., Lash, S. (1994). *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

- Beck, U. (1997). *The Reinvention of Politics: rethinking modernity in the global social order*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

- Beck, U. (1999). *World Risk Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Beck, U. (2006). *Living in the World Risk Society*. Lecture at the London School of Economics. 15 February.

- Beck, U. (2008). Reframing power in the globalized world. *Organization studies*, vol. 29, No. 5

- Beck, U. (2011). Infrastructure of risk: a mapping approach towards controversies on risks, *Journal of risk research*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 1-16

- Bennett, J. (2009). *Vibrant matter : A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press

- Caldeira, R. (2008). 'My land, your social transformations': Conflict within the landless people movement(MST), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Journal of rural studies* 24 150-160

- Carter, M. (2009). The landless rural workers movement and democracy in Brazil. *School of International Service, American University, Final Draft Version International Peasant Day.*

- Castells, M. (2006). The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy. In: M. Castells and G. Cardoso (eds), *The Network Society* (Center for Transatlantic Relations).

- Calhoun, C. (2007). *Contemporary sociological theory*. Malden, MA, Blackwell.

- Cardosso, F. H. (1997). A reforma agrária no Brasil. S.d.C.d.G. Presidência da República, ed. Governo Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Brasília.

- Durkheim, E. (1957). *Professional ethics and civic morals*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Eisenstadt, S.N. (2002). The First Multiple Modernities: Collective Identities, Public Spheres and Political Order in the Americas. In: L. Roniger and C. Waisman (eds.): *Globality and Multiple Modernities. Comparative North American and Latin American Perspectives*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp. 7-28..

- Esteva, G. and Prakash, M. S. (1998). *Grassroots postmodernism:remaking the soil of cultures* Zed, London.

- Esteva, G. (2010). From the Bottom-up: New institutional arrangements in Latin America. *Society for International Development*, Vol. 53 , No. 1, pp. 64–69.

- Fotiou, E. (2010). *From Medicine Men to Day Trippers: Shamanic Tourism in Iquitos, Peru.* PhD Dissertation in Anthropology. University of Wisconsin. Online: http://www.neip.info/downloads/Fotiou_Ayahuasca_2010.pdf

- Giddens, A. (1984). T*he constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity (publisher).

- Giddens, A. (1996). Affluence, poverty and the idea of a post-scarcity society. *Development and Change*, 27, 365-77.

- Giddens, A. and Pierson, C. (1998). *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity.* Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

- Giddens, A. (1999), Risk and Responsibility, *Modern Law Review*, Vol.62, No.1, pp.1–10.

- Habermas, J. (1985). Modernity- An incomplete project. In: H. Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture,* London: Pluto Press.

- Hawken, P. (2007). *Blessed unrest: how the largest movement in the world came into being and how no-one saw it coming.* Viking, New York

- Hess, C. (2008). Mapping the new commons, Governing Shared Resources—Connecting Local Experience to Global Challenges: 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons, University of Gloucester, Cheltenham.

- Holmgren, D. Weeds or Wild Nature: A Permaculture Perspective. *Plant Protection Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 92-97

- Naranjo, P. (1983). *Ayahuasca: Etnomedicina y Mitología*. Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones Libri Mundi.

- Inaytullah, S. (1988). Sarkar's spiritual dialectics: an unconventional view of the future. *Futures*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 54–65.

- Labate B. C., de Rose I. S. and dos Santos R. G. (2008). *Ayahuasca Religions: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Critical Essays*. Sarasota: MAPS Publications.

- Labate, B.C. and Pacheco, G. (2010). *Opening the portals of heaven: Brazilian ayahuasca music*. Berlin: Lit Verlag.

- Lash, S. and J. Urry (1994). *Economies of signs and space*. Sage, London.

- Lash S, Szerszynski B, Wynne B. (1996). *Risk, Environment and Modernity. Towards a New Ecology*. London: Sage

- Latour, B. (2009). A Collective of Humans and Non-humans. In: David Kaplan (ed.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Lundgren, B. (1987). ICRAF's first ten years. *Agroforestry Systems* Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 179-217

- MacKian, S. (2004). Mapping reflexive communities: visualizing the geographies of emotion. *Social & Cultural Geography*, Vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 615-631, Routledge

- Martins, M. D. (2000). The MST Challenge to Neoliberalism. *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 33-45, Sage Publications, Inc.

- McCowan, T. (2003). Participation and Education in the Landless People's Movement of Brazil. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, University of Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil.

- McMichael, P. (2006). Peasant Prospects in the Neoliberal Age New Political Economy. *New political economy*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 407-418

- McKenna, T. (1992). *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge: Radical History of Plants, Drugs and Human Evolution*, Rider, London.

- McKenna, D. J., Callaway J. C. and Grob C.S. (1998). The scientific investigation of ayahuasca: a review of past and current research. *Heffer Review of Psychedelic Research* Vol. 1, pp. 65-76

- Morissawa, M. (2001). *A história da luta pela terra e o MST*. Expressão Popular, Bela Vista, São Paolo.

- Nixon, B. (2007). All Rise - How Gandhi's thinking can help us in the 21st Century, *Challenge paper for the Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Development*, April, no. 3

- Olsen, B. (2010). *In defense of things. Archaeology and the ontology of objects*, Lanham, M.D.

- Oosterveer, P. (2002). Reinventing Risk Politics: Reflexive Modernity and the European BSE Crisis, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp 215-229

- Oyarzún, F. (2011). La idea de la persona ética y el materialismo vital. *Revista Chilena de Neuro-Psiquiatria* 49 (2), pp. 182-188

- Ploeg, J.D. van der (2010). The food crisis, industrialized farming and the imperial regime. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 98–106.

- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp.65-78.

- Riba, J. and Barbanoj, M. J. (2005). Bringing ayahuasca to the clinical research laboratory. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, Vol. *37*, No. 2, pp. 219–230.

- Schatzki, T.R., Cetina, K.K. and Savigny, E. (2001). *The practice turn in contemporary theory*. London: Routledge, 2001.

- Schatzki, T.R. (2007). Introduction. *Human affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 97-100

- Tupper, K.W. (2008). The globalization of ayahuasca: Harm reduction or benefit maximization? *International Journal of Drug Policy 19*, pp. 297–303

- Vergara-Camus, L. (2009). The politics of the MST: Autonomous Rural Communities, the State, and Electoral Politics. *Latin American perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 178-191.

- Whitefield, P. (1993). *Permaculture in a nutshell*. Permanent Publications, East Meon, Hampshire.

- Wolford, W. (2003). Producing community: The MST and land reform settlements in Brazil. *Journal of agrarian change*, vol. 3 no. 4, pp. 500-520.

- Wolford, W. (2010). Participatory democracy by default: land reform, social movements and the state in Brazil. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 37, No.1, pp 91-109