Voicing the Supply Chain

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ABSTRACT

The specialty coffee industry emphasizes the importance of personal relationships that span disparate levels of the supply chain and production models that focus on the wellbeing of coffee producers. This emphasis presents specialty coffee as a socially progressive form of consumption that is often represented as superior to mass-produced coffee. Discourses that emphasize relationships between baristas and professionals at other levels of the supply chain serve as a tool in marketing specialty coffee, with baristas serving as an interface between consumers and other levels of the supply chain. The somewhat recent elevation of baristas to professional status is due, in part, to the growth of barista competitions. This article takes barista competitions as a context for analysis, highlighting how baristas incorporate voices from across the supply chain into their competition performances. I argue that in voicing individuals from across the supply chain, baristas draw on the expertise and authority represented by coffee farmers and roasters to support the development of their own authentic professional persona. This article also shows that, by voicing the supply chain, baristas respond to consumer desires for more ethical forms of consumption through these narratives, providing the moral and emotional experience of coffee that consumers crave.

In sketching its evolution, professionals and scholars of coffee describe three major "waves" in the industry. The first came with the advent of the mass-market, industrialized world of Folgers, which brought the beverage into American homes. The emergence of Starbucks served as the harbinger of the second wave, bringing with it a world of personalized drinks, tailored to the individual. This period also marked the introduction of coffees defined by regional and country origins. Coffee became "Ethiopian" or "a Guatemala," a dramatic turn from freeze-dried Folgers. More recently, the third wave, and "specialty coffee" (Roseberry

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1996) more generally, is distinguished from these earlier periods through a focus whereby "beans are sourced from farms instead of countries, roasting is about bringing out rather than incinerating the unique characteristics of each bean" (Allen 2013, 334). And, crucially for this study, in the third wave the barista is considered an educator, an expert, and a professional; they are skilled artisans, dedicated to their craft and to providing customers with an exceptional coffee experience.

From the perspective of language, coffee's third wave provides an example of how barista-talk has become enregistered (Agha 2005) through its use by professionals within this community. However, the analysis presented in this article shows that barista-talk in the third wave stands apart from the standardized register of Starbucks coffee consumption (Manning 2008, 2012). Further, although it draws on the evaluative register of wine-speak, or "oinoglossia" (Silverstein 2003, 2006, 2016), I show that third wave barista-talk does far more than simply regiment or evaluate the indexical properties of coffee. Instead, my analysis highlights that barista-talk actually departs from oinoglossia through its emphasis on the development of relationships that extend across different levels of the coffee supply chain (Seigel 2009, 14; Cotter and Valentinsson 2018). In terms of production, this manifests in talk centering on the nature of trader-grower relationships (Weiss 2003) and fair-trade (West 2010; Lyon 2011; see also Besky 2014), but from the standpoint of the consumer, this talk reflects a premium placed on environmental and labor practices that create spaces for ethical forms of consumption (Carrier 2010; West 2010; Lyon 2011; Khamis 2015). The result is that coffee consumption has been elevated to the level of other luxury comestibles such as olive oil (Meneley 2007), small scale meat production (Cavanaugh 2016; Weiss 2016), and artisanal cheese (Paxson 2012), among many others.

As Lyon (2011) and West (2010) point out, however, despite the centrality of individual relationships and a focus on ethical consumption, the specialty coffee industry remains embedded within a web of structural inequity that exists between western coffee professionals and growers located primarily in the developing world. This emphasis on relationships connecting consumer to farmer, West's (2010, 694) "veritable love fest" within the specialty coffee world, contributes to what she describes as a "eco-neoliberal fiction; a fiction that is meant to divert our attention away from the structural causes of environmental degradation and social injustice" (2010, 694). Although West calls our attention to this fiction, her work does not examine the actual discursive processes through which it has been created. In this study, I show precisely how that fiction is created and proliferated through semiosis by a central character in the supply chain of specialty coffee: the barista.

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This study examines the character of the barista in one specific, highly regimented context within the specialty coffee industry; professional barista competitions. As Allen (2013, 335) has indicated, competitions like those discussed below have contributed to a shift in popular perception about the profession, transforming baristas from "deskilled automatons" (Manning 2008, 122) into the skilled artisans and experts that they are today. I draw heavily upon performative and linguistic data from US National and World Barista Championship events, with the performances analyzed here being chosen because they provide some of the clearest examples of the processes that I describe. Beyond these performances, I incorporate into my analysis recent documentary films focusing on third wave coffee professionals, as well as my own experience as a former barista working in third wave coffee establishments in Chicago and Atlanta for a total of three years between 2009 and 2014.

Below, I treat barista narratives as performative representations of the supply chain that are crafted for consumers. In doing so, I show how, as they incorporate the voices (Bakhtin 1981) of individuals from across the supply chain, baristas use these narratives as a tool in the cultivation of their own professional persona. The inclusion of this multitude of different voices in turn situates baristas as meaningful agents and experts within moral evaluative regimes tied to the nature of labor, economics, and politics within the global coffee trade. Their agentive status is further reinforced by their ability to influence the objects of these narratives: the coffee itself, through their involvement in coffee buying and sourcing.

Beyond simply representing themselves as an educator or expert, many professional baristas actually affect the object of the narratives that they perform, as I show below. Examining barista competition narratives from this perspective, barista-talk as a register then becomes an implicit account of a barista's own actions as an agent within the supply chain. Treating these narratives as the agentive accounts that they are reflects how barista narratives ultimately serve to "construct elsewheres within space and time, imaginative geographies" (Manning 2012, 20) that have the power to make consumption meaningful. These semiotic geographies are geared, of course, to the consumer as the final endpoint in the supply chain.

As earlier work has shown, the discourse of food consumption is fertile ground for the production of class distinctions (Cotter and Valentinsson 2018; Mapes 2018, 2020). This work has shown how the discourse of food relies on discursive strategies that construct what Mapes (2018) has termed "elite authenticity," "a condition or positionality which appeals to notions of sincerity, genuineness, naturalness or tradition, but which is rooted in, and only made possible by, privilege and socioeconomic advantage" (272). Through discursive connections that

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are ultimately rooted in different levels of the supply chain of food, consumers are able to assert cultural capital while partaking in consumption practices that appear ethical or socio-politically conscious (Bourdieu 1984, 1989; Mapes 2020).

This article adds to the insights of this earlier work by showing how the barista, by voicing the supply chain, is able to semiotically de-commodify coffee. This personalization of the supply chain, while on the one hand addressing the specialty coffee industry's emphasis on personal relationships, simultaneously addresses consumer desires for more ethical forms of consumption (Cotter and Valentinsson 2018; Mapes 2020). Baristas are able to provide consumers with a framework for the moral experience of coffee consumption. However, as I show in the remainder of this article, despite a desire to share coffee with the consumer, their reliance on the voices of other actors in the supply chain ultimately serves as a semiotic sleight of hand, masking the economic, political, and structural distances that endure within the specialty coffee market (Fridell 2007; West 2010; Lyon 2011) as baristas craft their own authentic professional personae.

Choreographing Coffee

To the average consumer, whose experience with coffee orients toward its caffeinating properties and its role in structuring forms of interaction (Gaudio 2003), the idea of competitive events centered around coffee preparation seems patently absurd. However, over 1,000 professional baristas compete annually in events across the United States with the hopes of advancing to the US Barista Championship.[1] Similar numbers compete globally in an attempt to make it to the World Barista Championship, which in 2018 featured competitors from over sixty countries around the world.[2] Professionals within the industry describe these events as both a "highly choreographed service routine" and a "sport" (Baijnauth 2015). These competitions are designed to generally simulate a customer service encounter of the type a consumer may experience when visiting a specialty coffee shop. These labels are apt descriptions of the competition, as baristas are given fifteen minutes to craft twelve drinks (four each of: espresso, cappuccino, and a signature drink), all the while delivering a highly scripted and rehearsed competition narrative.

These narratives are delivered in front of a live audience made up of other coffee professionals, as well as general spectators interested in the competition process. In addition to the live audience, these competitions are often broadcast live via the internet so that anyone can watch along at home. As they craft their

1. See http://uscoffeechampionships.org/.
2. See http://www.worldbaristachampionship.org/.

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twelve drinks, baristas present these beverages to a panel of four sensory judges for tasting (fig. 1). Throughout the competition, baristas are required to address this panel of sensory judges, as they are the primary audience for these narratives. In addition to this panel, a head judge and two technical judges circulate in the competition area, evaluating each barista on a number of factors. Baristas are awarded points within four broad categories as defined by the World Barista Championship organization (World Barista Championship 2017):

A. Has a mastery of technical skills, craftsmanship, communication skills and service skills and is passionate about the barista profession;
B. Has a broad understanding of coffee knowledge beyond the twelve drinks being served in the competition;
C. Prepares and serves high quality beverages; and
D. May serve as a role model and a source of inspiration for others.

Within these categories, baristas are judged on technical skill, a sensory evaluation of their drinks, their professionalism, and an overall impression from the judges on their performance (World Barista Championship 2017).

Given the exceedingly technical nature of these competitions, baristas often work with coaches to develop a choreographed competition routine. The months

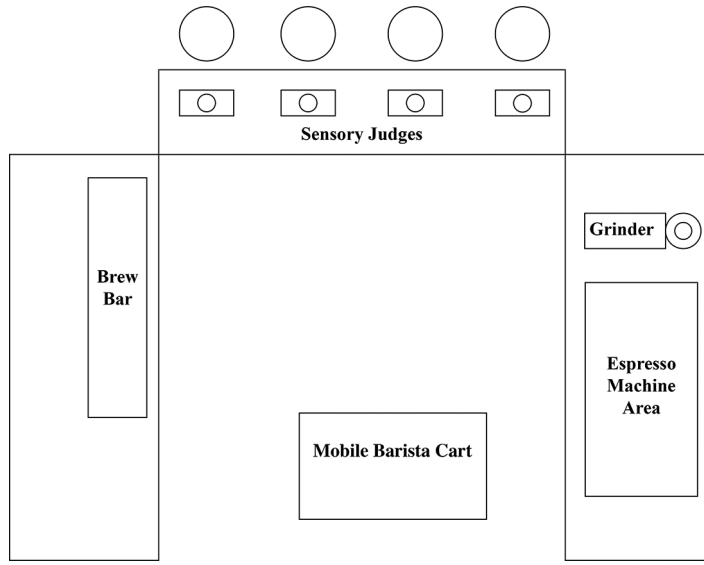


Figure 1. Diagram of a barista competition area

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leading up to these competitions are typically marked by hours spent working alongside their colleagues or a coach to hone a narrative about the drinks they intend to prepare and the coffee that they will serve. The process begins by choosing a competition coffee that the barista feels will work well with the drinks to be served during the event. The selection of this coffee takes place through a series of coffee cuppings (Steinman 2013; see also Cotter and Valentinsson 2018), tasting events where multiple coffees are evaluated and described in an effort to find a suitable bean with a desired flavor profile for the competition (Baijnauth 2015).

Coffee selection is deliberate and calculated, and the larger competition routine is built around this initial choice of coffee. Throughout the routine, multiple figures from the supply chain enter into these narratives, lending authority as the barista crafts an authentic professional persona or brand (Manning 2010; Gershon 2014, 2017). This persona is one that depends on these voices, but through this process the bodies and experiences of other actors in the supply chain are masked and erased (Irvine and Gal 2000), although they remain present in these narratives.

Looking at the register (Agha 2004, 2005) of barista-talk in such a scripted context might appear on the surface to be unrelated to understanding how language functions in daily life and its place within the types of moral-evaluative regimes that exist within transnational economic networks like coffee. However, the narratives of barista competitions reflect the day to day realities of baristas as professionals in a flourishing industry, while performatively reflecting actors at all levels of the supply chain who are brought forward through the embodied figure of the barista. At the same time, these narratives are constructed explicitly to be a presentation of specialty coffee as it would be offered to the final hands in the supply chain: consumers.

Examining language in this context, then, provides an interesting window into the types of talk that help to contribute to a barista's professional persona as they simultaneously speak to consumer desires for specific forms of consumption. The voices and experiences that make up these narratives serve to support the cultural and economic capital of the barista, while simultaneously acting to downplay the systemic inequality that endures within one of the world's most heavily traded commodities. As I have argued elsewhere (Cotter and Valentinsson 2018), the downplaying of this inequality addresses consumer desires for more "ethical" forms of consumption and imagined connections with different levels of the supply chain. In the sections that follow, I analyze the discourses surrounding each phase of these events, beginning with an analysis of the espresso course, followed by the cappuccino course and culminating in the signature drink. By

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analyzing each phase of these narratives, I show how baristas voice the varied levels of the coffee supply chain, de-commodifying coffee in the process as it travels from its point of origin to consumers.

Espresso and Voicing the Farmer

One byproduct of the nature of the third wave coffee movement and its emphasis on relationships that transcend the various levels of the supply chain is an increase in the frequency with which baristas and coffee buyers have direct relationships with the farmers who grow their coffee. The "buying trip" is a key component of specialty coffee sourcing, where professionals (including some baristas) tour farms and meet with producers in order to source the highest quality coffees for their customers. Increasingly, specialty coffee professionals work alongside farmers to develop new techniques that will allow them to grow higher-quality coffee, a point that I return to in my analysis of the narratives presented below. These relationships also manifest economically, with support to farmers that enables them to develop new technology for coffee growing and harvesting. These investments are made not only by companies, but also through the help of nongovernmental organizations operating in coffee growing regions in an effort to support local business (Lyon 2011; Rice 2013).

This outlook on coffee and the emphasis on the importance of cultivating these relationships sets third wave coffee apart from earlier stages in the industry. Although mass-marketed coffee still controls a bulk of the coffee market share (McCook 2013), specialty coffee has made an undeniable impact within the industry, with major specialty companies becoming multimillion-dollar operations.[3] It is within this vibrant and expanding industry that these competitions exist.

Baristas compete not just to showcase their abilities, but also to define themselves within the industry. Although working as a barista is not a particularly lucrative profession,[4] success in these competitions brings both recognition and lucrative sponsorship or investment opportunities that can support baristas in opening their own cafés or roasteries. I argue that one key ingredient for success in these events is the cultivation of an authentic professional persona. One

3. The acquisition of both Intelligentsia Coffee and Stumptown Coffee Roasters, specialty coffee's two largest names, by Peet's Coffee reflects the economic viability of the specialty niche. Although the details of these acquisitions have remained largely undisclosed, the $26 million acquisition of much smaller Handsome Coffee Roasters by Blue Bottle Coffee suggests that the Peet's acquisitions were likely in the hundreds of millions of dollars. For information about these acquisitions, see http://fortune.com/2015/10/30/peets-coffee-stake-intelligentsia/, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/07/business/dealbook/peets-buys-stumptown-coffee-roasters.html?_r=0, and http://sprudge.com/blue-bottle-coffee-buys-handsome-and-tonx-54906.html.

4. Based on recent statistics, baristas on average make just over $15,000 per year (Baijnauth 2015).

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method for cultivating these characteristics is through strategically incorporating the voice of other individuals in the supply chain into the narrative, as Pete Licata's espresso course in the 2013 World Barista Championship finals in transcript 1 suggests:

Transcript 1. 2013 World Barista Championship Finals, Pete Licata

1 I want to go back to the beginning of my career in coffee.
2 In 2003 we often focused, on the many hands in the chain of people
3 who would touch and affect our coffee before we ever got it.
4 And at that time, I couldn't truly understand what that really meant
5 because I was relatively inexperienced in the coffee industry.
6 But since that time, I've had some really amazing firsthand experiences
7 at multiple levels of the coffee chain.
8 And it's given me perspective on how you and I, as coffee professionals,
9 fit into that chain and how we can directly impact a coffee.
10 So today I want to go a little bit more in depth into the chain of hands of people
11 who have affected[5] the coffee that you're going to be tasting today
12 And I'm going to start with the first person in that chain.
13 I like to think of him as a cultivator of potential.
14 He's the farmer, and his name is Arnolfo Leguizamo.
15 He won the 2011 cup of excellence in Colombia.
16 But I tell you that I didn't seek out his coffee because he won the cup of excellence
17 I sought out his coffee because he's doing very intentional farming practices
18 That directly impact the flavor of his coffee.
19 So for example, he's enforcing ripe picking, and extra sorting at the mill.
20 And this is to ensure a selection of the most fully developed and mature seeds
21 that are going to have more carbohydrates and sugars available in them.
22 And that is going to lead to a sweeter cup of coffee.
23 Next, he's also doing a wet fermentation
24 And he's chosen this over other methods
25 because he likes what it does to the flavor of his coffee.
26 Specifically, he's doing a fifteen to twenty-hour fermentation
27 and he's doing four to five full rinses afterwards
28 To make sure the seeds are completely free of mucilage.
29 And this is to bring out more vibrant acidity and clarity of that acidity.
30 He's also got these really cool covered drying patios
31 where he can roll a cover over the coffee as it dries.
32 And he's doing this specifically to bring out a more complex acidity in this coffee.

From the outset of his narrative (line 2), Licata presents himself as a member of a broader professional community through the deictic *we*, while asserting his authority as a professional through his direct experiences with different levels of

5. Although in this portion of his narrative he is referencing a broader chain of people from across the supply chain that affect the coffee reaching consumers, later in the narrative (analyzed below), Licata locates himself explicitly as a final set of hands affecting the coffee being served.

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the coffee supply chain (line 6). Interestingly, although these narratives are constructed to mimic potential interactional events between baristas and consumers, the opening of Licata's narrative highlights the potentially leaky (Irvine 2011) nature of the barista-talk register. Although in line 2 Licata uses deixis to locate himself as part of a broader professional coffee community, initially at least, the judges of the competition were treated as idealized consumers. However, later in this portion of his narrative, Licata's footing shifts and deixis brings the judges together with the barista as he describes how "you and I, as coffee professionals, fit into that chain, and how we can directly impact a coffee" (lines 8–9).

That this register is so readily able to address both professional and consumer alike indicates that its porous nature allows for other voices and perspectives to enter into the narrative. Throughout this portion of his narrative, Licata draws on the figure of the farmer who produced the coffee that he is serving to the competition judges. This inclusion is grounded concretely (line 14) when Licata names the farmer directly, detailing his achievements in the international growing and production competition, the Cup of Excellence (line 15).

Throughout his narrative, Licata highlights the farmers own mental processes which influence his coffee production. More specifically, Licata calls attention to the farmer's intentionality (line 17), his enforcement of specific labor practices on his farm (lines 19 and 23), and the farmers own preferences with respect to the final flavor of his coffee (line 25). This centering of the farmer within the narrative reflects that Licata's status as a professional has its foundation, at least in part, in the decisions made by a farmer on the production end of the supply chain. By aligning himself with the goals and decisions made by the farmer, all of which influence this coffee's unique gustatory characteristics, Licata uses the farmer's expert status as a source of symbolic capital as he asserts his own expertise as a barista within the competition.[6]

The coffee that Licata is serving is good, in part because Licata himself is a professional and expert, but also because he has chosen to align himself with a farmer who is deliberate and intentional in his work, all of which influences the quality of the coffee being served. In this example both Licata and the farmer share goals and aspirations for what the coffee can be, pairing naturally together. Here, Licata uses the similarities between himself and the farmer as a tool, bringing the voice and expertise of the farmer into the competitive arena as a source

6. It is worth noting here that in the earlier semifinal round of the 2013 WBC competition, Licata draws on similar discursive strategies to those that I discuss here. Although his narrative from the semifinal round is not verbatim the same as his final performance, it is quite close in its content and structure. Importantly for my discussion, he similarly incorporates the figure and voice of different actors from the supply chain into his narrative.

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of authenticity and legitimacy. This authenticity and legitimacy ultimately provide Licata with symbolic capital within a competitive industry. Another example of how farmers are deployed in these contexts can be seen in Australian barista Sasa Sestic's narrative from the 2015 World Barista Championships in transcript 2:

Transcript 2. 2015 World Barista Championship Finals, Sasa Sestic

1 It is really good to be here with you, again.
2 So in the last four years,
3 as a barista and also a coffee buyer
4 I've met so many wonderful producers
5 And together we share the ideas
6 and experiments to help improve quality.
7 Now these experiences helped me realize that
8 in order to serve better coffees to my consumers
9 Which is you again, today
10 I wanted to do a lot more than just
11 go to the farm and buy the best lots.
12 So today I want to go a little bit more in depth
13 of innovative farming
14 and also new processing techniques
15 That was achieved through my relationships.

Sestic begins his competition routine by discussing individuals at other levels of the supply chain that he has met throughout his time working in the industry as both a barista and coffee buyer (lines 2–4). Through this narrative he presents himself as a professional concerned with innovation and quality, aligning himself with farmers and producers who share those values (lines 5–6). Professional authenticity for Sestic is located in being not only a barista, but also a coffee buyer who is actively affecting the coffee being served by working directly with coffee farmers to develop new techniques and methods for coffee harvesting and production.

As he emphasizes (line 11), Sestic goes beyond simply traveling to coffee growing regions and buying the best coffee. Instead, he is actively experimenting (line 6) with producers to produce better coffee for his customers. Through this emphasis and his utilization of the goals and experiences of individuals at other levels of the supply chain, Sestic embodies a "neoliberal self," "constantly enhancing one's skills, alliances, and assets—a self constantly in the process of transforming into a better version" (Gershon 2014, 290). Sestic's narrative highlights how as a barista he embodies this neoliberal understanding of self and its emphasis on continued enhancement. But at the same time, his narrative exemplifies

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how his professional brand is "uneasily anchored in the materiality of certain objects using the socially locatable individual with a vivid but abstract set of personal qualities as the framing metaphor" (289). By using the coffee as a material anchor in his narrative, Sestic shows us how baristas need the supply chain, its diverse voices, and its material manifestation in the form of coffee as they work to craft their own professional brand or persona.

Alongside his narration of the goals of this particular farmer, Sestic discusses the new and innovative techniques used by the farmer to grow his coffee, including improved facilities for washing and processing the coffee. Sestic shares with the judges the farmer's hopes in employing these new techniques as well as what these methods bring to the eventual flavor of the coffee the judges are consuming. Sestic incorporates the farmer as an agentive actor in the narrative, drawing symbolic capital from the farmer's status as an expert as Sestic solidifies support for his own authenticity and expert persona in the industry. Further, Sestic uses discussion of agricultural practices in his narrative to reinforce for the judges his close relationship with the farmer, while providing the judges with a material representation of that relationship in the form of the final coffee being served, which has been affected by the choices of both the farmer and Sestic himself in the growing and processing process.

As the narrative progresses, Sestic constructs himself in concert with the farmer that he works with, while also directly linking his discourse and product with another craft industry: wine. Sestic discusses that in developing the coffee being served and the processing advancements noted above, he drew inspiration for these practices from the wine industry. In doing so, he locates his persona as a barista and coffee buyer within an already existing system of techniques, methods, and authority (Gershon 2014, 287; Weiss 2016, 9), and this discursive move grounds the knowledge that he shares with the judges in the status of the wine industry.

This discursive move highlights that in addition to a similarity between specialty coffee talk and oinoglossia, these industries have also moved closer together at the level of production. Through these shared production techniques, coffee comes to stand alongside wine in the realm of luxury comestibles (Silverstein 2016). However, although these industries have moved closer together, particularly in their evaluative registers, barista-talk departs from oinoglossia in a number of distinctive ways.

Specifically, while oinoglossia is an inherently evaluative register, the barista-talk examined here is focused towards the consumer: the copresent "you" that is about to have coffee. In this sense, barista-talk is discursively aligned with the

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actual event of purchasing and consuming coffee. Through its ultimate focus on the consumer, barista-talk as a register centers on providing consumers with a moral and emotional experience of coffee. This experience is quite distinct from the haughty, "elite" experience of wine tasting.[7] At the same time, as I show below, this focus in barista-talk on moral and emotional connections to coffee reflects broader consumer trends related to coffee consumption that emphasize a desire to consume ethically and consciously.

By discursively aligning with another artisanal industry, Sestic casts himself as a professional concerned with affecting the final coffee through the use of new and unique processes to develop coffees that will be of the highest quality. Throughout this narrative process, Sestic reminds the judges of his relationship with the farmer, which has led to the development of the coffee that he is serving. The emphasis on this relationship comes to the surface concretely later in the narrative, as he discusses a unique shade system developed by the farmer in Colombia. He notes that while physically in Colombia—emphasizing that he is not only a barista, but also someone who travels to coffee growing regions to buy coffee and work with coffee producers—the farmer intimated that through the utilization of these practices more sugar in the coffee beans could be retained, contributing to its unique flavor profile. In emphasizing the sweetness of this coffee, Sestic described this characteristic as being hard won and instructs the panel of judges to "enjoy the sweetness that we both worked so hard for." Here, Sestic's use of deixis reinforces his own role in affecting the coffee—through his physical labor, as well as his relationship with the farmer.

In both of the excerpts presented here, the farmer serves as a prominent figure in the narrative surrounding the espresso course of these routines. In defining themselves for the judges and other industry professionals, baristas align themselves with hands at the production level of the supply chain, and by incorporating the farmer, discursively align themselves with the goals and outlooks of these individuals. However, although hands at other levels of the supply chain are present in these narratives, a certain level of erasure also takes place through this narrative process. Irvine and Gal suggest that the existence of a problematic element which fits an alternative narrative within a given context may act as a stimulus for erasure (2000, 38–39). Within the specialty coffee industry, this problematic element can be seen in the perduring inequalities and unequal

7. Cotter and Valentinsson (2018) also provides a detailed analysis of other ways that specialty coffee talk diverges from oinoglossia, in particular the indexical bivalency of coffee talk and its ability to navigate prominent forms of class anxiety that consumers face.

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power relations that are tied intimately with labor, economics, and politics, all of which act on coffee in various ways despite earnest attempts by individuals within the industry to improve labor and economic relationships with specific coffee producers.

My experience within the industry suggests that many baristas, roasters, and café owners genuinely see these relationships not only as an opportunity for them to secure the best coffee, an economic motivating factor, but also as a means by which to strengthen and support coffee producing regions and producers themselves. However, despite the ways in which some producers have benefitted from these types of relationships (Lyon 2011), the erasure that takes place in these narratives represents an inevitable byproduct of the process by which the voice of the barista is synergized with that of the farmer. Further, this erasure shows the extent to which relationships like those described by Licata and Sestic have normalized the profoundly unequal power relations that are at the heart of the global coffee trade (Naylor 2013).[8]

This "moral authority of Fairtrade" (Dolan 2010, 41), which I argue can be extended to the types of direct, one-to-one relationships that serve as the foundations of the narratives presented here, ultimately act to erase the inequality that runs through the industry. The result of these processes creates a narrative picture in which the presence of other voices in the competition routine is one marred by absence. The barista is foregrounded, with the competition centering on both how they have affected the coffee being served, as well as what they as baristas can fashion with the products that have gone through other hands in the supply chain. A point that I will return to below, but offer initially here, is the idea that for the barista to gain the symbolic capital necessary for them to craft an authentic persona in the specialty coffee world, these voices are a necessity. They constitute an integral part of not only the routine, but of the barista's persona more broadly.

Although erasure occurs in the discursive moves defining these competitions, the barista depends on these voices in much the same way that the farmers and producers depend on the baristas and buyers who provide economic support and capital to their agricultural projects. For baristas, these voices reify their status as an expert, and the presence of these voices allows baristas to fulfill

8. The normalization of these unequal power relations can also be seen in consumer marketing and branding of specialty coffee, which regularly draws on these relationships while downplaying enduring forms of inequality that exist between the predominantly middle- to upper-middle-class consumer market for specialty coffee and coffee producing communities around the world (Cotter and Valentinsson 2018).

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one of their major industry roles as a consumer educator (West 2012, 217). The nature of this relationship as defined by the continual discursive presence, but physical absence, of other figures from the supply chain can be seen in additional examples surfacing in the cappuccino phase of the competition.

Cappuccino and Voicing the Roaster

As my analysis of the espresso course of these routines has shown, one of the most striking components of these narratives is the prominence of the voice of the coffee farmer and producer. These voices are foundational not only for the competition performance itself, but as I expand on throughout the remainder of my analysis, for the notions of professional authenticity that are at the core of the barista's persona in the specialty coffee industry. In the cappuccino phase, where competitors are required to synergize espresso with milk for the judges, new voices from the supply chain emerge in these contexts. While the espresso phase of the competition was marked by the presence of the farmer, in the cappuccino phase figures such as the coffee roaster and the dairy farmer become prominent voices alongside the barista. The first example of this infusion of new voices can be seen in the excerpt from Pete Licata's 2013 WBC performance in transcript 3:

Transcript 3. 2013 World Barista Championship Finals, Pete Licata

1 Now as you saw in your booklets
2 John Welsh is our roaster at Pirizzi coffee
3 And I had the opportunity and pleasure of working directly with him
4 In developing the roast profile for this coffee.
5 If you see below his picture, there's a graph that is a representation of the roasting process
6 And it says in very simple terms
7 That as time and temperature increase in roast
8 The nuance and acidity from the farm tend to decrease in presence
9 And the body and sweetness that are from the roast tend to increase to a certain degree.
10 Balancing these two elements is one of the major ways
11 that a roaster can directly impact the flavor of a coffee.
12 Now, we also were able to look at the variety, the [incomprehensible]
13 and the elevation of 1750 meters
14 Knowing that this coffee was maturing very slowly and ended up as a hard bean
15 So we had to start with a low temperature input
16 Before then increasing the temperature to begin caramelization
17 and fully developing the flavor of this coffee.

In this portion of the competition, Licata uses similar discursive techniques that incorporate the voices of individuals at other levels of the supply chain. In preparing his cappuccino course, Licata calls out the roaster of this specific

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coffee by name, which commentators on the event described as "adding characters to the story." Licata also directs the judges to a material representation of other levels of the supply chain in the form of a printed booklet that accompanied his narrative performance (line 1). As he directs the judges to a graph within the booklet (line 5), Licata voices the expertise of John Welsh, the coffee roaster, as he details the technical specifics of the roasting process and its effect on the final bean being served (lines 7–11).

By naming the roaster directly and providing the judges with a photo,[9] Licata biographically individuates the roaster's voice within the narrative (Agha 2005, 43). This individuation provides the judges, as well as consumers, with the experience that this narrative is inhabited by more than a single biographic identity: it is double-voiced (Agha 2005, 44). The presence of multiple voices is reinforced as Licata presents himself as working alongside the roaster (lines 3 & 15), a discursive alignment of their mutual labor, to influence the flavor profile of the coffee being served during the competition. As was the case with Licata's incorporation of the farmer in the espresso course, voicing the roaster lends legitimacy and authenticity to Licata's performance and his persona within the industry. He highlights that at all levels of the supply chain, he is aligned with other professionals who are committed to providing high quality coffee.

Although the presence of the roaster is important to the structure of Licata's narrative, this double voicing discursively erases the roaster from the supply chain, despite their prominent place within the performance. The voice of the roaster, his goals, his desires, and his interests within the industry are recontextualized (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 74–75) through the embodied figure of the barista. The implied connection between the barista and these other hands of the supply chain are made manifest through the barista's embodiment of the goals, aspirations, and outlooks of these other voices (Roth-Gordon 2011, 221). The barista represents the main point of contact between a consumer and the world of coffee. In many cases, roasting is done behind the scenes, out of public view to at least some degree. In this narrative, Licata brings the roaster to the foreground while simultaneously representing himself as the embodied "voice" (Bucholtz and Hall 2016) of the coffee, a point that I return to in my analysis of the signature drink portion of this competition.

9. The incorporation of a photo of the coffee roaster speaks to a wider industry trend that West (2012) has noted, wherein the bodies and images of coffee producers at various levels of the supply chain are utilized as a means by which to market the commodity itself. More recent discussions of this trend (e.g., Cotter and Valentinsson 2018) have suggested that the inclusion of these images serves to bolster the authenticity of the coffee being sold, while also playing a role in assuaging white, middle-class, North American anxieties surrounding consumption and broader moral/ethical concerns.

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Before moving on to the final phase of the competition, the signature drink phase, I introduce another character that surfaces in these competitions as an ancillary to the supply chain of coffee as it is traditionally conceived. In the 2013 WBC finals, Australian barista Matt Perger incorporated the figure and voice of the dairy farmer into his competition narrative during the cappuccino portion of the event. As transcript 4 shows, Perger goes beyond simply incorporating the voice and actions of the dairy farmer, going as far as incorporating the individual cow who produced the milk being used to craft the competition cappuccinos:

Transcript 4. 2013 World Barista Championship Finals, Matt Perger

1 So I think if we were all honest
2 we'd say that cappuccinos are probably the most difficult beverage
3 of the three to get really excited about.
4 So I decided to take a very unique approach to the combination of milk and coffee.
5 I started talking to my dairy farmer, Mark Peterson, who's here today
6 About the effect of a cow's diet on flavor
7 And after some experimentation we started getting some really amazing results.
8 By mixing in some different vegetation into the cows diet the day before milking
9 We were able to go from that plain sweet milk taste
10 To something that's so much more complex and pairs more intimately with the red bourbon.
11 Now I'm also serving you, excuse me, I'm also serving you some of that milk on the side
12 so you'll really be able to appreciate how it interacts with the coffee as well.
13 So the milk that you're drinking today
14 Actually comes from a cow named Blossom, it's a different cow today.
15 She's much cuter than Freckles.
16 Now Mark put her onto a clover field the day before he milked her
17 And that drastic change in diet actually affected her digestive system
18 Creating this wonderfully unique milk.

In addition to adding a new character into the larger constellation of voices from the supply chain, Perger's use of the dairy farmer is less common in this context. In contrast to earlier examples, Perger's dairy farmer is actually in attendance at the event, a point that Perger reiterates in his narrative (line 5). Despite this difference, whereby earlier characters in these events were physically absent, similarities across these examples can be found when looking at Perger's wider narrative.

Here, as was the case with Licata's narrative above, we see the barista aligning himself with the goals and aspirations of the farmer. Perger describes himself as working alongside the dairy farmer as they collectively experimented with different dietary choices for the cows producing the competition milk (lines 7–8) in

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an effort to affect the ultimate flavor of the drink being served. The cow itself is even mentioned by name (line 14), highlighting the role of the animal in this process. The result of this collaborative experimentation between barista, farmer, and cow? An artisanal milk produced by a cow fed on a field of clover that paired "intimately" (line 10) with the coffee being served. Through his narrative Perger integrates both the farmer and the animal as meaningful actors in crafting high quality coffee through the development of this unique milk. Tannen's (2007) "talking the dog" becomes talking the cow, as it were, as Perger draws on non-verbal (both literally and figuratively) third parties, as discursive resources in crafting his own professional authenticity: in this case a present but silent dairy farmer and an absent, non-verbal cow.

Perger's integration of dairy production professionals into his narrative sets him apart within the industry, and commentators on the competition describe his introduction of this figure into the routine as a novel move. Coffee professionals that I know from my time in the industry also confirm that narratives like this are one of the key components of Perger's professional persona. Although Perger's narrative is in many ways unique when viewed alongside the other examples presented thus far, the general structure of the narrative is similar.

Although Perger calls attention (line 5) to the dairy farmer's physical presence at the competition, his narrative ultimately downplays the role of the farmer in the production of the cappuccino being served to the judges. Through a superposition of the voice of the barista with that of the dairy farmer in describing their experimentation and collaboration (lines 7–8) these two distinct voices and skillsets are synergized in the narrative. As with the cases identified above, through incorporating voices from other levels of the supply chain, Perger is able to draw on the expertise and symbolic capital that these other voices afford as they lend an air of authenticity to his own professional persona. The result is that, again, the barista is foregrounded in these narratives despite the role of other voices as a key component in crafting a successful narrative, and a great cup of coffee. The continual presence of these voices can be seen again in the final phase of the competition, the signature drink.

The "Signature Drink" as Thesis

The final stage of the competition, the signature drink course, is considered by most if not all of the individuals competing in these competitions as the place where the personality and creativity of the barista shines through. The driving idea behind the signature drink course is that a barista can craft any type of espresso-based drink that they would like, using any ingredients or method,

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but that each ingredient must serve a purpose and that purpose must be made clear to the judges (Baijnauth 2015). This affords baristas the flexibility to experiment with different drink ideas in the months leading up to competitions. The result is a wide array of different signature drinks ranging from espresso-based beverages utilizing stone fruit reductions, to more complex beverages like affogatos containing ice cream made by the barista during the competition, or even distilled coffee made by extracting coffee solids during the routine (Baijnauth 2015).

The signature drink, as it was described by professional barista Charlie Habegger (Baijnauth 2015), is a beverage that should only work with the specific coffee chosen for the competition. It is a drink that could not exist outside of the regime of different forms of labor throughout the supply chain that have created the coffee being used as a base for the beverage. This creates a complex process of drink development, that baristas describe as taking months to perfect. This phase of the competition is also the period in which the collectivity of voices that have emerged throughout the competition come together. That coalescence of voices is exemplified in Pete Licata's 2013 WBC finals performance in transcript 5:

Transcript 5. 2013 World Barista Championship Finals, Pete Licata

1 And now, at this point in our coffee chain
2 I, as the barista, become the voice of this coffee
3 Because I represent everyone who has affected this coffee before me
4 And at the same time, I have to give my own characteristics
5 Through my own methods and techniques.
6 So for my signature drink I wanted to focus on that original extraction
7 Twenty grams in the portafilter, thirty-eight grams in the cup
8 Because I think that this best showcases the identity of what this coffee really is.
9 Now, I've already affected this by chilling the espresso
10 That's going to change our perception when we taste
11 To more on the acidic side, right?
12 And the acidity is what Arnolfo was so intent on cultivating in this coffee.
13 Now, I also wanted to affect this drink through the use of ingredients
14 And at the beginning of my presentation you saw me making this
15 Which is, a palm sugar simple syrup.
16 Palm sugar is simply the dried sap of a date palm tree
17 But I decided to use this because it has a rich and heavy sweetness
18 And its reminiscent of the sweetness and the body
19 that we experienced in the original espresso.
20 Sweetness and body are both characteristics
21 that John worked so hard to unlock in this coffee.
22 Now, just like every coffee that I prepare, I add character too.
23 I also want to add character and complexity to my drink
24 And I'm doing that with this, it's a non-alcoholic bitters
25 And it's made with orange peel, lemongrass, and quinine.

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Transcript 5 (*Continued*)

26	The orange peel and lemon grass are going to give an overall
27	citric characteristic that is going to enhance that grape like acidity
28	And the quinine is going to give an overall balance and complexity to the drink.
29	Now, as I stir this together it's going to allow me to mix the ingredients
30	it's going to preserve that acidity, it's very gentle on it
31	And it's going to give me a controlled dilution through the melting of the ice cubes.
32	This small amount of water is going to give me just enough space
33	for all of these ingredients to work well together and play together.

In this excerpt Licata brings the voices from various levels of the supply chain together in the narrative for the signature drink component of his routine. The goals and desires of the coffee farmer are again highlighted (lines 10–12), but crucially here Licata casts himself as the one who is ultimately responsible for actualizing the desires of the farmer. More specifically, it is Licata as the barista that is able to bring out the acidity that Arnolfo the farmer "was so intent on cultivating in this coffee" (line 12). Similarly, as he describes a palm sugar syrup that he developed for his signature drink, Licata highlights (lines 18–19) his responsibility for actualizing the characteristics that the coffee roaster "worked so hard to unlock" (line 21).

Although this coffee was affected by hands at many levels of the supply chain, in the final portion of Licata's narrative it is the barista that bears the ultimate responsibility for translating those effects into a final cup of coffee for consumers. This acknowledgment of responsibility reflects that this portion of the routine is set apart from earlier courses by the efforts of the barista in foregrounding his own accomplishments, goals, and creativity in crafting the signature drink. Although the barista was a continual figure in the espresso and cappuccino portions of the routine, often presented as working alongside the farmer and roaster in crafting the coffee, in this section we are provided an example of the desires of the individual barista to affect the development of the flavor being presented in the signature drink.

As he crafts his signature drink for the judges, Licata describes his decision to chill the espresso that serves as a base for the beverage (line 9) in an effort to bring out its acidic qualities. Similarly, in line 13 Licata discusses his decision to use the palm syrup described above to bring out the sweetness of the coffee. These characteristics: acidity and sweetness, are ones linked to the voices and figures of the farmer and roaster at other levels of the supply chain. After he describes for the judges how his decisions reflect the work of individuals at other levels of the supply chain, Licata then leaves the farmer and roaster behind (line 23)

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to foreground his contribution to the signature drink: a non-alcoholic bitters of orange peel, lemongrass, and quinine, which adds his personal touch as the final set of hands in the supply chain.

As this example suggests, the signature drink phase is a context in which voices from the supply chain are central, but here they are infused with the creativity, authenticity, and personality of the baristas themselves. That authenticity and personality has, at all stages in the competition, been buttressed by the existence of other voices outside of that of the barista. In drawing on these voices in the broader competition narrative, the barista makes use of the authenticity and legitimacy that other hands in the supply chain represent. However, as Licata describes in the closing of his routine in transcript 6, the barista remains the "voice" of the coffee, despite the presence of other figures across the production process and competition narrative:

Transcript 6. 2013 World Barista Championship Finals, Pete Licata

1 Now, as the voice of this coffee I also have the responsibility
2 Of presenting it to the final set of hands in this chain
3 And today, those hands are yours, for the third day those hands are yours.
4 And I'd like to say, on behalf of John, Arnolfo, myself,
5 and many other coffee professionals who have affected this coffee
6 Please, enjoy it because we've worked so hard to bring out the best in this coffee
7 So you can do simply that, enjoy it.

The key to the signature drink phase, and the larger construction of the competition narrative, is that much like the drinks being crafted for the judges, the collection of voices from the various levels of the supply chain must coalesce into a larger embodied whole through the figure of the professional barista. The barista is, on many levels, the final stage in the supply chain of coffee before it is presented to the consumer, which in the context of these competitions is a role inhabited by the panel of judges scoring the competition. If these routines are situated within the broader sphere of consumer and retail coffee consumption, which these competitions aim to mimic, we can see how barista narratives, and a barista's embodiment of the supply chain, provide consumers with a moral and emotional experience of both a coffee and the labor and agricultural regimes through which that coffee is produced. I conclude this analysis by reiterating the role that these voices play in these narratives and how their use intersects with larger socioeconomic and political forces that represent a powerful undercurrent in the global coffee industry.

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Voicing the Supply Chain

In looking at this collection of narratives from barista competitions, I have shown how baristas utilize the voices of other figures in the supply chain of coffee to develop successful and compelling performances. Examining the three major phases of these competitions—espresso, cappuccino, and signature drink—provides an opportunity to see how the personalities and professional personae of baristas intersect with the voices of farmers and coffee roasters, all of whom leave their mark on the coffee being served.

However, more than leaving a mark on the coffee, these voices and the individuals they represent leave their mark on the barista themselves. As the voices, expertise, and experiences from the varied levels of the supply chain are incorporated into these competition narratives, they play a critical role in the baristas' efforts to establish their own authenticity and authority in an evolving professional community. The supply chain of coffee is long, but one of the cornerstones of the third wave coffee movement remains an emphasis on building relationships at multiple levels throughout this chain. The focus on these relationships can be read as signs that index larger characteristics of the specialty coffee industry (Agha 2007; Wortham, Mortimer, and Allard 2011, 194). By examining how the voices representing these relationships enter into these narratives, we see evidence of the impact of those relationships on one of the final sets of hands to affect a coffee, that of the barista.

For a barista to cultivate a professional persona in the industry that is treated as authentic, authoritative, and legitimate, these voices must necessarily play a role in how a given barista presents themselves. A barista cannot be the best at their craft without access to high quality coffee, and access to this material capital requires relationships with farmers and producers who form the backbone of specialty coffee production. Baristas need the farmer, because through the farmer they obtain the material and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1989) necessary to compete, not only in the competitions analyzed here, but in the industry more generally. At the same time, farmers, producers, and, to a lesser extent, roasters rely on the barista because they, and the cafés they work in, are the source of demand for the products that are cultivated at other levels of the supply chain. Without the figure of the barista, and the barista profession more generally, the economic viability of coffee is diminished within the specialty industry. Coffee, of course, represents the foundation of this industry, but the barista brings that coffee to the consumer, providing them with the context and experience of their consumption.

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Beyond playing a major role in how baristas locate themselves within the industry, in voicing these other levels of the supply chain, baristas contribute to a masking of the structural inequality that runs through many levels of the global coffee trade. These discursive moves appear on the surface to lessen the metaphorical and geographical distance between the largely white, Western audience that participates in the specialty coffee industry, and the predominantly nonwhite farmers and producers that grow and harvest the coffee. They discursively push an ethos that positions coffee as "more than simply a commodity" (Baijnauth 2015). However, this ubiquitous comestible remains implicated in deeply unequal transnational social, economic, and political regimes that affect all levels of its production and consumption. The narratives that I have examined here show how this "eco-neoliberal fiction" (West 2010, 694) of coffee is discursively constructed.

Barista-talk within these competitions also responds to the desires of the individuals that represent the final stage in coffee's supply chain: the consumer. As I have argued above, these narratives emphasize social relationships between baristas, farmers, and roasters. By strategically voicing the supply chain, baristas are able to present specialty coffee, the consumption of which is unquestionably steeped in socioeconomic privilege (Mapes 2018), as a moral pursuit for consumers. As the inequalities of the supply chain are replaced by direct relationships synergized within the figure of the barista, space is opened up for decidedly "elite" forms of consumption to become ethical and progressive. Barista narratives are able to accomplish this in part because they draw consumers into the relationships that baristas describe.

I, as a consumer, order my pour-over coffee from Pete the barista. In the course of our conversation across the café counter, Pete tells me about both Arnolfo the farmer and John the roaster. I learn about what they tried to accomplish in growing and roasting this coffee. Pete also tells me about how he tweaked today's pour-over recipe to make the coffee what it is as he slides the cup across the counter to my waiting hand. The voicing of the supply chain that I have described semiotically decommodifies coffee for the consumer. In doing so, it provides consumers with a moral and emotional experience that speaks to middle and upper-middle class desires for more ethical forms of consumption (Cotter and Valentinsson 2018; Mapes 2018).

The analysis that I have presented above provides an avenue through which to see how forms of professional authenticity are discursively constructed in a highly regimented environment, and how those forms of authenticity draw on and incorporate forms of expertise that exist at other levels in transnational

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supply chains. At the same time, in this study I foreground the ways that discursive practice intersects with broader socioeconomic and political issues that are continually negotiated by both professionals and consumers within spheres of consumption. When baristas in these competitions talk about the signature drink as a synergy of coffee, creativity, and personality, we can also think of these competitions and the larger third wave coffee movement of which they are a part as a synergy of capital, economics, and politics.

All of the component parts of the specialty coffee industry coalesce in the competition environment. The supply chain converges, and the voices of its members emerge in the embodied form of the barista through the narratives that I have presented above. As I have argued, throughout these narratives the barista is continually located as the voice and face of the supply chain. They voice professionals from other levels of this chain, but although they are discursively present, their bodies and experiences are made absent. Their agency as actors in one of the most economically viable commodity trades on the planet is diminished, while the agency and authenticity of the baristas serving this commodity to a socially conscious public is supported through a complex web of discursive events that play out in the competition arena.

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