Recognition-Based Systems of Engagement and Exchange for the Development of Alternative Agriculture

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By

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FOREWORD

Thomas Fitzsimons was a man of many talents. He was a writer, a thinker, a philosopher, a musician, a carpenter, an artist, a teacher, a humanitarian, an environmentalist, a nature enthusiast. Above all else, he was a father, and a great one at that.

Born in Cork in 1963, Tom was raised in Ballinlough, along with his two brothers, Jim and Kevin, and his sister Patricia. He was a curious child who had a natural ability to think "outside of the box", always questioning and observing life around him. He did so quietly, and usually took the path of least resistance. He had a low tolerance for injustice, for himself, and for others. He was quietly ambitious and found joy in sociology, philosophy, psychology and science, far beyond his years. Always eager to learn, he got his first taste of academic success when he received an award for the BT Young Scientist Exhibition in 1980. When he completed secondary school, he chose to focus on his creative side. Working with his hands brought him joy, as he learned to manipulate wood and transform it into crafted pieces of furniture through the trade of carpentry.

In his late twenties, Tom chose to leave the city behind and found himself in the Dingle Peninsula close to Ventry Harbour. As a skilled craftsman, he chose to build his own home, occasionally getting help from friends. There he found an appreciation for the simple pleasures in life, valuing his connections with people. Tom did not believe in materialism and was content with few possessions. He found peace in nature and in shared solitude.

The next twenty years of Tom's life were dedicated to his two daughters, igniting in them a love for nature, showing them the value of critical thinking and authenticity and of finding joy in the everyday. He also spent this time writing, gardening and growing vegetables on his land. His sense of social and environmental injustice heightened and he felt a deep desire to do something about the way in which the world was changing.

In his early fifties, once his children had grown up, Tom decided to pull his years of thinking together and entered university as a mature student. With the support from his partner Sabine, he succeeded in completing a Bachelor's

Degree in Philosophy and Sociology, and a PhD in Sociology. During his studies, Tom was able to combine his understanding of society with his passion for environmental progress, aiming to encourage the development of alternative agriculture and to change the ways of thinking about farming and food.

During his research for this book, Tom's approach was very much participatory, visiting farms across Ireland, partaking in farm walks, building relationships by talking to farmers, activists and educators, volunteers, and officials from state and civil society agencies. He immersed himself in the rural landscape and engaged with those involved in alternative agriculture.

Tom had a truly unique way of seeing the world and had a natural ability to express complex thoughts and ideas. He was a rarity, with a heart of gold, and it is our pleasure to share his work with the world and with kindred minds. We hope it can provide valuable insights and plant a seed for important discussion.

—His daughters, Mimi and Órla

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Masanobu Fukuoka, author of *The One Straw Revolution* (Fukuoka, 1978) was first of all a scientist and later an experimental farmer, as was Albert Howard (one of the founders of the organic movement). They both saw fit to leave their laboratories or areas of specialism and go to the fields in the 1930s as practitioners and observers. They both sought to discover through trial and error and careful observation how best to produce food, while at the same time trying to mimic nature or follow natural patterns. They had the idea that science and the narrow productivist script, in many ways determined what was studied and consequently, which methods were pursued. These features had led humanity on an erroneous path, a pathway which was traversed at speed. Unfortunately, the rate at which the new methods were adopted was not matched with enthusiasm for validating the implied claims of improvement, or for interrogating the longer-term consequences. Fukuoka's first book is talked about today as a classic, often popping up in conversations on organic or other alternative farms or within related networks. A farmer described to me how Fukuoka shaped his thinking, in particular on the subject of "accumulated error". The moulding and transformation of agricultural methods and the emasculation of the farmers' relationship with nature, with his fellow farmers and wider society, was often based on the mistaken premise, which was built up in layers. There is a memetic process, he told me, whereby one farmer breaks with tradition and gets an increased yield (or the same yield with less labour, or less input costs) and other farmers quickly follow suit. The advantage may be clawed back by nature as the years go by (depleted soil biology or the emergence of weaker strains of plants and animals) but by then perhaps another or several other "innovations" or changes in practices have come into play and the ability to observe the diminishing returns of the first is lost. According to alternative farmers, the frenetic rate of change associated with conventional farming is necessary to keep the productivist script going, as science and technology, plus big business must always be seen to have the answers. "They" have the key to the solutions treadmill and there are many solutions needed as the socio-ecological system cascades down an ever-

narrower spiral towards zero fertility. The ability of the ecosystem to absorb pollutants and recover over a period of time is not considered. As the same farmer pointed out, if alternative farmers are able to solve a problem, their solution, more often than not, is ignored because science-based or large-scale solutions have to be seen to win, or put another way, the adoption of scientific-entrepreneurial routes to maximise output must be seen as "the precondition of all possibilities" (Lukács, 1968). There are no down sides for the farmer. He just needs to follow the script or get a job, usually both.

Fukuoka was having the same problem in the 1930s and 1940s. Many scientists and professors came to see his remarkable yields and were shocked by the low levels of pests, weeds and disease among his crops. All were achieved with zero inputs from beyond the farm and no ploughing, in fact, far less labour than one would expect, and less intervention in the natural processes on a manual level than thought possible. Fukuoka remarked that the professors would leave, and they would never be heard from again. In the work of Axel Honneth, the German social philosopher, this is known as "withholding recognition", or an act of misrecognition. The suppression of alternative means to achieving the benign goal of feeding the human race, with the most effective and accessible methods, embedded in communities where people could expect a good livelihood farming on a small scale, is actually an area that has not been extensively dealt with by academic research. This would appear to be a substantial omission on the part of research designers and funding agencies, as problems emanating from industrial modes of production only started to manifest in the last thirty years. Likewise, interest in alternative methods aimed at reversing the damage on an ecological and social level are not as recent as some commentators might suggest.

Honneth's recognition theory retrieves Hegelian ideas relating to mutual recognition as fundamental for building the social institutions which are now taken for granted, such as the legal system. But the origins of contractual obligations and the highly rationalised thought structures that go with these social artefacts are actually recognitional in nature. Honneth rightly asserts that forgetfulness, a disregard for the origins of systems of thought or interpretation, can lead to the development of social pathologies. Honneth's recognition theory gives primacy to recognition and recognitional thought patterns over cognition or cognitional thought patterns. In this book, full use is made of this distinction as well as its implications for the study of alternative agriculture and its associated networks. Strongly alternative farmers are cast as recognition based, while those who tend to follow the

logic of the market are thought to be governed by calculative thinking and prone to the objectification of all resources.

Currently, we struggle to make sense of food systems that have become a major source of pollution, while at the same time destroying the topsoil, negatively altering microbial ecosystems in freshwater streams and rivers, and introducing harmful components into the human food chain. The development of a polluting and resource-destroying food system is a remarkable story, and a somewhat depressing one, given that holistic solutions were already identified as far back as the 1930s[1]. The work of Rudolf Steiner can be added to the above list with that of the farmers with whom he had contact in the 1920s, which led to the bio-dynamic agricultural movement. According to Lockeretz (2007), this was the first formal organic agriculture. In Japan, the first community supported agriculture farms (CSAs)[2] followed the example of Fukuoka[3], further proving that slowly developing knowledge structures involving very few actors can be extremely effective in instigating collective-action-orientated and bottom-up innovations. It cannot be emphasised enough that these solutions were available at the genesis of the previously mentioned "destructive" treadmill, a set of interlocking systems that would wipe out so many small farmers and local provisioning systems. Knowing what is now known, it is difficult to see how this original misrecognition could not be construed as anything but a corrupt impulse. One social theoretical way of looking at it is that a social pathology took root around that time which, although identified, was not successfully uprooted.

Alas, these exemplary actors have come and gone, but they had successors, who either followed their advice and adopted it to their own soil, climatic and socio-cultural conditions, or discovered other quirky tendencies that nature revealed to them; things that restore the balance in soils through interventions that mimic nature (Lockeretz, 2007). The micro level social and ecological changes resulting from their efforts stand out as an example, although usually one that is not followed. Combining these social and

[1] Of course, developing countries were still in the throes of agroecological peasant agriculture. There the resistance was not a reversal to natural processes but a refusal to adopt high input practices.
[2] CSAs are farms which provide food by prior arrangement with customers who in turn agree to share the risks as well as the rewards of that season with the farmer.
[3] "TEIKEI" system see Country Report for the First IFOAM Asian Conference 19-22. Aug. 1993 in Hanno, Saitama, Japan. Available at http://www.joaa.net/english/teikei.htm accessed [26-10-2019]

ecological dimensions, I see these ongoing localised events collectively as an exemplary regenerative process. I developed this idea from talking to farmers, some of whom describe their farms as regenerative farms and endeavour to extend the impact of the farm to the social world, that is, the community, their customers and society as a whole. There are those who have overcome various resistances and barriers over time, to be recognised within the networks as the model alternative farmer or farmer-educator. These are a primary focus of this book.

In recent years, state interventions have been designed to "bribe" a proportion of farmers to adopt the organic model through the third-party certification model of assessment, state-assisted marketing and attractive subsidies. This is seen by many as a mistake, as it introduces a shallow take on the original principles of the organic movement, which also emphasised small farms, local markets and social factors, such as equality of access to higher quality and more nutritious sources of fresh food (Lund *et al*., 2002). It is proposed that the aforementioned social pathology (through its proponents) ekes out opportunities for its own reinvention by coalescing with all newcomers, aiding their efforts, studying their methods and lavishing them with praise and awards before slipping out of the restraints and moral commitments to create another strain of conventional agriculture. To the mainstream actors, the ecological point of view is just an option and one that they would have wished never came into being. They assume a segment of the consuming public will pay for producers to "waste their time", creating the ultimate guilt free product. To zoom out, for them, is to see a segmented market with lots of conventional and atypical opportunities, to zoom in, is to ponder over the puzzle of how to survive in some kind of highly competitive specialism, what they call a niche market. Unless of course they operate on a huge scale across multiple jurisdictions, in that case, their purpose is to feed the masses with the cheap and cheerful, while supplying better off groups with high-end conventional product[4].

Transposing primary producers from being peasant type farmers to being entrepreneurial and from there (if circumstances permit), to engagement in scaled-up capitalist agriculture, is one of many patterns in the empirical world that has become the preoccupation of rural sociologists (Van der Ploeg, 2018). In the western world, extension services (state sponsored agricultural researchers and advisors) are explicitly supportive of agri-business solutions, which can only happen on a corporate scale. This has of

[4] Ireland's export business in infant milk formula follows this pattern.

course pushed farmers into having an entrepreneurial approach, together with the hygiene fanaticism, pharmaceutical-based animal health perspectives, and bureaucratic regulatory controls. Unsurprisingly, these features usually coincide with subsidy qualifiers. Farmers often have to hire private advisors to help navigate through paperwork, to get their subsidy applications fine-tuned [5], maximising their unearned income, in order to offset their expenditures on expensive inputs. Some highly regarded rural sociologists and food system scholars have created, or made tactical good use of, concepts like re-peasantisation, re-agrarianisation, re-localisation and profit sufficiency while stopping short of an outright attack on corporate interests that have run roughshod over farmers, their families and their communities in the part of the world where these scholars are likely to reside. More direct criticism of corporate interests operating closer to home appears on the websites of food sovereignty organisations and peasant farming interest groups like European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC).

Farmers have, for thousands of years, been able to engage with the market and have been sufficiently entrepreneurial to keep body and soul together. That is not to say there were not crisis moments. Disruptions due to wars, economic decline and freak weather conditions, litter the history of food provisioning. I have witnessed, during the course of this study, farmers who either on a collective, familial or entrepreneurial level have managed to avoid the kind of diktat that tells practitioners how to think. They minimised or eliminated subsidies and seemed to be making their own way in the world as sovereign producers. In this case a local or regional engagement with the world seems adequate and a micro level engagement with the soil and the plants and animals which derive nutrients from and return nutrients to that soil seems to be driving a revolution in thinking about farming.

Is it so unreasonable to propose that where recognition is withheld (I'm thinking of Fukuoka), detachment becomes inevitable and in an escalation of these positions, where recognition is withheld aggressively, a more disproportionate and unnecessary detachment wrenches people and things from their roots? This book presents evidence that a significant number of farmers, including those who are quite conservative in their ways, have decided that a detached, clinical *modus operandi,* where business minded,

[5] The Talamh Beo founder member is also an advisor and confirmed this point at the first public meeting 2018. Farmer Burke (f) also confirms this competitive atmosphere around subsidies where farmers seek to outdo each other with their own skills and by seeking professional help.

and profit orientated actors seem to rule supreme, is not suited to primary food production. Through paying close attention to the recognitional nature of alternative farming, I explicate this largely unexplored facet of resistances to co-optation and make a contribution to a concept common in European rural sociology known as autonomous restructuring. Some of the hallmarks of these farmers include, observation as a default knowledge generator, seeing the more knowledgeable other as a person, giving priority to relational ties and face to face contact, recognising bio-regional characteristics, perceiving micro climes and fertility variations within landholdings, identifying mutual interests and potential collaborations with other farmers but also with both urban and rural dwellers without recourse to institution building. In asking the question: "What would fill the vacuum left by the abandonment of detached, clinical thinking as the default mental process?" I had presented myself with an intriguing problem.

It is proposed here that re-jigging the way these recognition-based mental events and cognition-based mental events are bound together habitually can significantly impact one's capacity to resist co-optation and disempowerment. In short, it is suggested that alternative farmers are instinctively enacting a corrective measure whereby the habitual way that they deploy recognition and various forms of cognition gets turned on its head, or should we say back on its feet.

I explore these issues through a focus on three central research questions. First, I ask: "How is Irish alternative agriculture distinctive and how does it differ from conventional agriculture?" This question suspends the assumption that alternative farms are qualitatively different and puts the onus on the researcher to provide an account of these differences and distinctive features as they occur in the present climate and in the Irish context. Secondly, I ask the core research question: "Do Irish alternative farmers use recognition-based systems of engagement and exchange?" and "How might disengagement from a recognitive stance (or the renewal of misrecognition) happen?" This question seeks to establish evidence for the existence of recognitional forms and is suggestive of a dynamic process which is characterised by reversals to mainstream entrepreneurial forms of engagement. The question hopes to provoke a new approach to understanding this dynamic. Finally, the third question is an auxiliary question in support of the task set out in question two: "Can the concept of distributed cognition be usefully employed to further explore aspects of recognition-based engagement and exchange?" This question allows for the tentative exploration of the ways in which situated and extended cognition enable

recognitive exchange in the context of the alternative farms and their supporting networks.

Alternative and Conventional Approaches as they Stand

In Ireland, there are many opposers of conventional agriculture. These opposers are part of a loose coalition of actors, strands of which originated in the organic, bio-dynamic or environmental movements, others such as members of community supported agriculture, food sovereignty organisations and the slow food movement are recent additions. Although these oppositions are a substantial counterweight to the ethos of productivism, destabilization of support for the conventional approach has come from other sources such as mainstream consumers. If one were to listen to Green Party politicians, climate activists and a growing number of scientific advisors, the tide is turning, but slower than the (increasing) rate of destruction still being pursued. The following are just some of the more significant issues which have led to the mainstream food system being subjected to increased scrutiny: 1) The demand for more organic or higher quality and artisan foods took root; 2) Food scares such as Human Variant CJD and the creation of antibiotic resistant bacteria on a massive scale, put a dent in the legitimacy of conventional methods as the trusted source of safe food; 3) Fears in relation to long term effects of ingesting chemical residues and genetically altered food (GMOs) helped mobilise support for alternative producers; 4) A growing international consensus on global threats caused or exacerbated by conventional agriculture, such as climate change, top-soil degradation, biodiversity loss and water pollution has become a permanent feature of the international scene; 5) Consensus at UN level and among NGOs has proposed that agroecology is the solution to global food scarcity/security threats accentuated by rising population, higher demand for meat and dairy in emerging economies, and competition for land from energy crop investors and property developers; 6) More recently the bio-nutrient content of conventionally produced food has been revealed to be poor, which correlates with depleted soils. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the conventional approach to agriculture is fighting for its survival, but, due to overwhelming private financial resources, consistently large state subsidies and a powerful political lobby, it could be around for some time yet. In fact, the balance of probabilities suggests that firstly, it is not going to lose that fight and secondly, it intends to co-opt its opponents and turn these problems (oppositions) into opportunities.

For those who support conventional methods, there are reasons to be hopeful. "Ireland Inc." stands out as a leading proponent of export agriculture, committed to intensive production and the continuation of policies featuring the maximisation of output through conventional means. As part of the national lobby at EU level, but also in terms of interest-group-based and corporate-based power brokers, Irish actors (on the conventional side) have a reputation for punching above their weight and getting good deals. In contrast, Ireland lags behind its European counterparts in organic production, relying instead on an undeserving green image. As one organic farmer told me "Ireland is green because lots of rain falls on it", describing the government's policies on sustainable agriculture as "total greenwash". But more recently the pressure to make more profound changes is mounting.

For many years now the EU has encouraged its member states to minimize the damaging effects of conventional farming but has also given support for its continuance via subsidies. In many instances, individual states are given much latitude as to how to apply EU policy. As mentioned above, intensive lobbying by well organised and well-funded conventional farmers has kept the conventional approach in a dominant position, while at the same time capturing huge proportions of EU budgets (CAP funding absorbed 73% in 1985 and 37.2% in 2018 of the EU budgets [EU commission 2019]). Ireland has responded to various selection pressures (Geels, 2010, 2011) emanating from consumers, citizens and from EU policy makers by funding various schemes for promoting organic agriculture (Healy, 2015), but also controversially, it funds schemes which allow conventional farmers to reduce harmful inputs incrementally. Many consider these increments too small, a sort of "bluff" sustainability exercise or greenwash.

The argument against this minimalist approach was given some weight when the government branded one version of these incremental improvements as "Origin Green" subsequently using this brand to market Irish farm produce abroad. Those who are eager to promote a middle ground where farmers pay increasing attention to soil biology and use cover crops to "fix" nutrients rather than applying manufactured inputs are also making their presence felt in Ireland. With these methods, termed "biological farming", it is up to the farmer whether or not to use chemical inputs side by side with agroecological methods. In this book, the broad term "alternative agriculture" is used to describe all efforts to break away from conventional agriculture and implement agroecological methods in Ireland.

While there are grey areas, tolerance for certain ambiguities is necessary in order to understand a situation that is in constant flux[6].

Many people in industrial countries ask if there is some way to have more organic, biodynamic and community supported agriculture. Apart from paying people via subsidies and enticements to switch, is there a way to have more wholesome foods coming out of farms? But is that a request for a quantitative *more* or a qualitative *more*? Or does it really matter? Many alternative farmers are a little sceptical about the newly converted organic farmers, saying that these newcomers are doing it for the premium price and the subsidy payment. There is some evidence that this might be the case (Lund *et al*., 2002), but is it not preferable than a situation where those farmers continue chemical-based farming indefinitely? Not everyone agrees.

To determine how to have more of something, it might be wise to look closer at its qualitative dimensions. If alternative ways of food provisioning dwells within its own microcosm, and develops incrementally via qualitative progressions, the question remains, how might it reach beyond this point? In this book, it is proposed, that through recovering recognition-based systems of engagement and exchange, this kind of agriculture finds its feet and naturally migrates to new territories when conditions are optimal. A positive contagion effect, if you will. Its proponents adapt to the soil and climatic conditions as well as the social idiosyncrasies of that particular area, and that can take many years, even decades. It seems there are many questions of a qualitative nature that need answering.

The first task, in order to form a baseline for further critique, and provide a starting point for structured research, was to examine alternative agricultural practices in the Irish context. To this end an introductory typology of Irish alternative agriculture was developed and this helped to conceptualise an approach and weed out some of the ambiguities present in the many shades of alterity. Then a sample of alternative farms was visited. Some of these visits yielded interviews with farmers, some more casual conversations with volunteers, or yielded opportunities for participatory observation. In other cases, organised farm walks were the first point of access, which often provided further data collection opportunities.

[6] There are limits of course, for example “Origin Green” will be treated as conventional agriculture in this book, but this is typical.

An engagement with alternative farmers took place, both at their place of work, and in other contexts, such as at conferences, or on farm walks where the farmers were visiting other farms. An ethnographic approach was the primary method, but the synthesis of this approach, and that of grounded theory, is important to the overall methodology. Testimony of farmers' and network actors' was obtained by participation in farm activities, and through more formal arrangements such as conducting interviews, and this is detailed with reference to some aspects of the supporting literature in anthropology and sociology.

Scholarly work carried out in relation to alternative food networks and rural development in Europe is plentiful and in chapter two, as well as discussing methodology, the texts thought to be relevant, are dealt with under headings such as "Considering the boundaries of alterity", "Is allegiance switching or crossing the divide a real problem for AFNs?" and "AFN structures that create distinctive practices and embedded formats". On rural development, the usefulness of recurring concepts, such as multifunctionality and pluriactivity are examined, while the rationale for the theoretical and analytical framework used is presented through a discussion of relevant work carried out on recognition and reification by authors such as Honneth, Lukács and Hegel. Finally, the Vygotskian tradition and its impact on social research is summarised, as is the concept of distributed cognition.

Chapter 3 gives a broad account of alternative farms in the Republic of Ireland from 2018 to 2019, selecting twelve farms, presented in three panels. Four beef and tillage farms are presented in panel 1; four farmer-educators and horticulturists are presented in panel 2; and four CSA and box scheme operations are presented in panel 3. In the second part of the chapter, consideration is given to the outcome of the interviews, conversations and observations. An attempt is made to conceptualise primary features that make alternative farms distinctive and this goes some way towards answering the first research question: How is Irish alternative agriculture distinctive and how does it differ from conventional agriculture? For instance, alternative farmers believe that they are improving the ecological capacity of their farmland and according to them, this is something that builds fertility and biodiversity over the longer term. Conventional farmers do not prioritise this aspect of agriculture. Organic, biodynamic, CSAs and biological farming are some of the ways farmers describe their approaches, others use phrases like "I'm just doing it". This heterogeneity could be seen as a hinderance to the researcher. While it can certainly be confusing at times, the splintering might be there for a reason. One wonders if these ruptures are caused by pressure exerted from mainstream distribution

systems and institutional actors' bias towards a formulaic replication of products for what they term "niche" markets. As one answers the question: "What is alternative farming in Ireland today and how does it differ from conventional farming?", one is presented with a puzzle. Contemporary theories such as social embeddedness, conventionalisation, bifurcation, reflexive localism, network theory, moral economics, solidarity economies and so on, do seem to fall short on so many levels. For example, conventional approaches to Irish agriculture are also tied to moral notions about authentic or traditional rural communities, display solidarity in certain circumstances, are keen to develop multiple networks and can tap into local revenue streams rather seamlessly. Embeddedness as a concept can also be applied to many aspects of conventional forms of agriculture. Although the proponents of these mid-level theoretical constructs have shown how the alternative forms of agriculture display distinctive and durable types of local networks with unique moral motivations, many other writers, including those associated with conventionalisation theory and entrepreneurial studies, were able to point to ambiguities within these arguments and to porous boundaries between the conventional and the alternative actors. Taking this into account, the search for a different theoretical approach led this author to a combination of recognition theory (Honneth 1996, 2003, 2008) and Vygotskian (1978) approaches to social theory. The latter concerned "the more knowledgeable other" and "distributed cognition" but also the importance of social artefacts and the historical and social context of knowledge transfers.

Chapter four entitled "Exploring the Recognitional Stance", presents extracts from the interviews or paraphrased accounts of recordings from farm walks or conferences as evidence. The purpose of this chapter was to broadly answer research question 2: "Do Irish alternative farmers use recognition-based systems of engagement and exchange? How might disengagement from a recognitive stance (or the renewal of misrecognition) happen?" and to identify areas of interest which could form the starting point for additional investigations or research agendas. The data appears to confirm that there are many behaviours, practices and social structures that exhibit a recognitional rather than a cognitional bias on Irish alternative farms or within the associated networks. For example, the issue of respecting the roots of a specific aspect of knowledge or a specific dialogue centring on soil health, might be an interesting area to examine. One sub-section is entitled "Acknowledgement of the socio-cultural and historical context of the knowledge". It was found that some proponents of the biological farming, and holistic management approach tend to ignore the fact that organic, biodynamic and natural farmers have been talking about

many of the same issues as these "new kids on that block" have just discovered. These original pioneers and disciples had developed solutions similar if not identical to these "new" solutions. This forgetfulness, or severance from previous versions, which had stressed connectedness, engaged praxis or moral, future-observing considerations is interesting from a recognition theory point of view, but also from a Vygotskian standpoint, as both might well depict such behaviours as cognitivist, utilitarian and detrimental to longer-term developmental concerns on an individual and societal level. Other proposed indicators of a recognitive stance were considered such as "Establishing and Maintaining Place-Based Opportunity" which delved into ideas like creating a space, creating a product, pedagogical-role and providing a transformative dynamic to the local community. It was observed in the course of the research that more entrepreneurial alternative farmers tend to depart from the locale, extending their reach for strategic reasons. Their energies often become very much focused on that external effort. To acknowledge that local people are better off with local food provisioning, that their lives are improved if farmers invite them to their farm to learn about that natural space, the biodiversity and connectedness of all living things, this is part of a recognitional stance. When a farmer or collectively owned farm reinvests assets locally and cultivates a grounding of human and social capital, it is proposed that these behaviours can be seen as confirmation of the recognitional having primacy over the cognitional or the strategic.

Chapter five focuses on "distributed cognition". It was thought that the use of recognition theory was plausible but lacked something. Some notion of extended or situated cognition seemed to fill that void, possibly because farming is a very practice orientated occupation, and distributed cognition is a useful tool in the analysis of communities of practice. The evidence presented in this chapter is an attempt to answer the third research question: "Can the concept of distributed cognition be usefully employed to further explore aspects of question two?" and it is thought to adequately demonstrate that synthesis of Honneth's notions on recognition and the idea of extended cognition can be revealing and appears to be applicable in these kind of practice orientated surroundings. Seeing nature as a "creator and host of dispersed knowledge" reflects how alternative farmers do their job. Some classic distributed cognition studies focus on the human actors who jointly superimpose themselves on linked technological thinking, measuring and information relaying machines as in the cockpit of an aeroplane. Alternative farmers see the natural world almost in the same way, as plants that have a mind of their own, sensing competition and responding with aggressive tactics or going to seed when they think the options for further

growth have disappeared early in the season. They appear to think of each component of the natural world as having its own cognitive programme and the overall integration effect is also thought of as a thinking being, akin to "mother nature". This may be a heuristic device to convey something to others. Important for this study is the farmer's acknowledgement that "nature knows", it knows itself. In fact, the complexity of what nature, and what it knows about itself, is a source of fascination to farmers as they are continually discovering more facts, more interconnectedness. Although it is not a cognitive performance in any way similar to that found in the human brain, the natural world has communication systems and intricacies of possible responses to any scenario, to any intervention from humans. It is not unreasonable to think of nature as a creator and host of dispersed knowledge.

The second main focus of this chapter is distributed cognition at the human to non-human interface. Alternative farmers are continually getting down on their hands and knees, or picking up soil in their hands, as they explain to the students, volunteers or visitors how they gain understanding about natural processes. Farmers involved in holistically managed grazing are plucking blades of grass or turning over cow dung in the fields to demonstrate how it happens. The thought processes of alternative farmers, and the thought processes of their co-practitioners, are very close to the actual soil, the grass plant, or the crop of wheat. The farmer, employees and volunteers co-create the cognitive exchanges at the interface where they interact with the previously mentioned host. This mirrors the kind of distribution or superimposition of human subjects over a non-human assemblage which Hutchins (1995) talks about in his classic "cognition in the wild", except this is a different kind of wilderness.

Finally, the deferral of cognitive tasks to new institutional forms is subjected to critical analysis. An example of one of these tasks is to explain to potential customers what kind of alternative agriculture, a particular farm, its workers and volunteers represent. This, when done with a certain level of competency, can generate revenue, possible new relationships and network connections, and perhaps also legitimacy with a public who may have had reservations about these types of operations. Normally the task would be distributed among various actors close to the farm or the network of customers or members (in the case of a CSA). Some farms reach a level of complexity, in terms of socially orientated tasks, so that it seems like a good idea to outsource part of the job. Even if the new institutional form carries with it certain ambiguities, and these ambiguities will then be leaking into the narrative of the farm and its own network, this seems to be an

acceptable exchange for some actors. This scenario is compared with farms which appear to consciously keep all their thinking tasks in-house. They seem to have thought through their strategy on how to communicate their ethos very clearly, and more or less stick to it. Familial or single person operations may have the advantage of having a stable message to contend with.

Chapter six is where the main discussion takes place and where recommendations are proposed, contrasting the recognition-theoretic approach with some of the more effective approaches espoused by the AFN and European rural development literature. It discusses how some of the AFN literature may exhibit a less than adequate understanding of how the actors within AFNs actually contend with conflicting objectives on a day-to-day basis, and how those rural sociologists and human geographers, who are adept at interpreting these actors' ecological, ethical and socio-economic aspirations, are sometimes not studied with sufficient attention to detail. This can form the basis of weakly structured critiques of AFN literature which all too often goes unanswered.

Later, the common good approach is weighed against private, acquisitive motivations which are ever present in market economies. Casting the crossing over from alternative to conventionalised versions of alterity in food provisioning as a cognitive process, at least in the initial stages, is thought to be a demonstration of how new insights become available to researchers by adopting recognition theory and distributed cognition theory as basic tools of analysis and interpretation but also shows how these are two compatible vantage points. Other suggestions which are said to lend credibility to the approach relate to testing concepts like the objectification of the persona of the farmer and the role of the farm as it moves towards a more entrepreneurial operation. This leads to the farm being reduced to a thing which is expected to perform, interpreted as leading to the redundancy of the recognitive stance.

As a sub-section of this chapter, is a discussion of what a synthesis of recognition theory and distributed cognition might look like. A Heuristic Map showing the relationship of recognitional and cognitional domains reflects some important aspects of Honneth's rehabilitation of the "reification concept" (2008). As discussed in the literature review the Vygotskian approach and Honneth's association with Hegel and Lukács all point to Hegelian, Marxist and Russian roots. As the above synthesis is something that may have a broader range of applicability, beyond alternative agriculture and AFNs, it was decided to refrain from possibly

overstating its relevance to the task at hand. Recognitional stance and distributed cognition have been found to have complementary properties in the case of alternative agriculture and its supporting networks. That said, it is hard to consider the distinctive aspects of recognitional behaviours, practices and social structures without being aware of its flip side, the more abstract and calculative cognitive versions of same.

Recommendations for future research include the use of the term "ecological entrepreneurship" to describe actors in conventional agriculture who are engaging with agroecological methods and are said to be discovering new opportunities as a result. On a more theoretical level, the systematic compartmentalisation of the forms of recognition in the context of alternative agriculture and AFNs is thought to be a promising area for further study. This takes a Hegelian notion and brings it forward to the present day as a possible strategy. The pre-contractual relations of regard which was pointed out by Hegel are still relevant today, and this suggests that institution building has not eviscerated the need for mutual recognition, even by actors in competitive situations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE, THEORY AND METHODS

Alternative Food Network Literature

This chapter explores some of the issues in the area of alternative agriculture in Ireland today as expressed in the home produced and internationally available literature. At the same time, it attempts to give an up-to-date account of what the state of the art can offer the specific concerns elucidated by this book. Current trends in the literature that focus on the fundamental nature of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) and the New Rural Development Paradigm has somewhat decreased in recent years and many of the familiar authors have moved on to international perspectives on food systems, or are following new interests such as hybrid markets, agroecology, food security, sustainable intensification, ecological intensification, peasant agriculture and genetic pollution. Despite this, the AFN and New Rural Paradigm literature needs to be looked at as an invaluable resource, but one that has perhaps fallen prey to sub-optimal conceptual tools. Embeddedness, conventionalisation, bifurcation, social network analysis, moral economies of food and de-peasantisation are some of the more interesting and frequently used ideas but thick ethnography still seems to be the methodology of choice for many AFN studies.

After dealing with the AFN and rural development (RD) literature as it stands, I decided that an alternative direction needed to be explored. The recognitional stance of alternative farmers and the actors within associated networks was viewed as a potential alternative strategy to the ones discussed in the existing literature. With a view to this, the recognition theory of Honneth is explored in depth. Particular attention is paid to Honneth's rehabilitation of Lukács's idea of reification. As an additional theoretical dimension, the social research emanating from Vygotsky is assessed, particularly ideas around the sociocultural context of learning environments and extended or (socially) distributed interpretations of cognition. The selection of literature in this section is not exhaustive, as the intention is to provide the impetus to establish new ways of seeing the problems associated with alternative agriculture, not to start a debate on the limits of cognitive