

Drink: The Nature of Beverages and Landscape Transformation

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The past decade evidenced tremendous interest from the humanities in the relationship between food and nature. Writers such as Michael Pollan, (*The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*; *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*; *The Botany of Desire*), or Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*), and a host of books about individual food items and their environmental impact (e.g., bananas, tomatoes, cod, salt, sugar) have raised awareness about the broader social and environmental prices of our foodstuffs. The growth in food studies, food politics, and the cultures of eating as a transnational academic discipline in the environmental humanities is nothing short of remarkable. However, this interdisciplinary field has failed to engage with the most essential of all foods: the beverages we drink. Curiously few studies have explored the specific connection between beverages and nature, despite the fact that the global production of beverages, from bottled water to fine wine, is a \$1.6 trillion dollar business that utilizes a significant amount of the earth's resources. This relationship between beverages, the environment, and humans is fundamental to most societies and their economies.

My research connects a rather everyday occurrence—having a cup of coffee or tea, a soft drink, a glass of wine, a mug of beer—to the process of landscape transformation in communities and ecosystems around the globe. Drinks gratify our desires for sustenance, stimulation, and intoxication, among others, but this thirst should also engender appreciation and concern for the people and places that made possible our gratification. Examining how beverage ingredients such as coffee beans, tea leaves, or fresh water are sourced provides a lens to reflect on the transformation of landscapes—primarily forests, but also grasslands—and how cultivation, marketing, and distribution efforts can contribute to the conservation and/or degradation of physical and cultural landscapes. For this project I will use the narrative scholarship approach often used by scholars working in the environmental humanities, and in this sense my project aims to broaden for all of us the notion of what is consumed when we have a drink.