A CULTURE OF COFFEE: TRANSMEDIATING THE ETHIOPIAN COFFEE CEREMONY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the utilization of transmedia formats, specifically that of an art book, blog, and e-book, in remediating the cultural significance of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. These varying interfaces will allow me to explore the parallels between the evolution of Ethiopia’s ritual coffee practices and that of coffee culture within the larger global market.

Toward this end, the advent of book publishing is conceived as its own form of cultural semiotics. By juxtaposing the social trajectories of these two very rich historical fixtures (coffee and books), I establish an atypical and interactive model for cross-cultural exchange as well as remediation, in terms of technology's role in adapting cultural narrative.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to those who continue to preserve and express the legacies of cultural heritage across new frontiers, and to my family and friends who supported me in this endeavor.

Many thanks,
Metasebia E. Yoseph
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INTRODUCTION

My background as an Ethiopian-American has always challenged me to find commonalities between seemingly disparate groups and ideas. I consider culture to be a conduit for dialogue, interaction, critical analysis and change. By examining a particular aspect or artifact of a specific culture, I believe we are able to broaden our scope of understanding and find unexpected connections. For the past two years, I have been doing just that. The majority of my graduate career has been focused on one word: coffee. Specifically, Ethiopian coffee and its cultural imprint around the world. In the process of my scholarly research, the integration of culture and technology has been a means for promoting cross-cultural exchange and accessing a little know historical narrative. I apply my hybrid Ethio-American lens to my transmedia thesis project A Culture of Coffee. This interdisciplinary endeavor explores the origins of Ethiopian coffee culture and ceremony in order to provoke both mainstream consumers and coffee enthusiasts, as well as Ethiopians already familiar with the ceremony, to contemplate the social trajectory and cultural inheritance that came to shape coffee as they know it. I engage enthusiasts and novices, alike, to provoke reconsideration of the everyday “cup of Joe”. With myself as the central intermediary in this process of cultural remediation, I examine the implementation of a blog, e-book, and art-book, not only as appropriate technologies in engaging these two disparate groups/demographics, but as forms integral in transmitting the traditional and distinctive elements of this unique cultural product.

As the birthplace of coffee, the little know ceremonies and rituals that continue to thrive in present-day Ethiopia are a testament to its cultural significance. In Ethiopia, the slow roast and
process of brewing coffee is an opportunity for dialogue and community interaction. Coffee's role as an agent of social cohesion and fraternity, maybe hard to envision in the current Western understanding of the coffee shop, a far cry from its origins in Ethiopia. Yet the roots of coffee’s culture were remarkably significant to the introduction of this social stimulant to the rest of the world. Its advent necessitated the creation of shared common spaces for its consumption (cafés); laying the foundation for public discourse and contributing to the development of the modern enlightenment.

By reexamining the storied relationship between coffee, public discourse and the printed word, we begin to understand the capacity the stimulant has to facilitate communal expression. Coffee provided grounds and inspiration for revolutionary transformations in the way we communicate and socialize. This underlying argument is key in the project’s utilization of various technological platforms, particularly social media, in reactivating and remediating the aspect of social engagement underpinning the value of coffee as a cultural artifact. In addition to activating the sense of community integral to coffee’s cultural origins, each medium allows me to optimize on the original networks of human movement and exchange that first brought coffee from Ethiopia, ages ago. In this regard, the project’s fusion of social and technologic currents is as much transformational as it is cyclical.

My transmedia project occupies the multimedia of the e-book, the user-centered perspective of social media, and the symbolic power of the art-book to provide a multidimensional experience with coffee. In representing its history and pioneering culture, intention and technology have global significance, as far as reception is concerned. My original
intention for the project was to present the final research in the form of an illustrative book entitled, *From Ethiopia with Love*. I launched a hypermedia blog on tumblr called *A Culture of Coffee* to serve as a virtual hub until its completion. This online platform provided a space to engage coffee enthusiasts directly and to share my research and findings about the history of Ethiopian coffee and its influence, the world over. From celebrity endorsements of caffeinated delicacies to 15th century Turkish coffee houses, I have used my blog to place the traditions of coffee in a topical context. I have highlighted everything, from an event hosted by chef Marcus Samuelsson that incorporated the Ethiopian coffee ceremony to the uniquely “white coffee” of Malaysia, as well as the Library of Congress lecture on the intellectual property issues surrounding coffee, and much more.

As I continued to update the blog, I watched it gain momentum and witnessed its ability to, not only present my information, but create a space for multi-directional dialogue, as well. This observation altered the course of the entire project. Containing and creating discussion on tumblr allowed my audience and participants to access and share information easily. For example, I would post a picture of roasted coffee beans and immediately receive feedback from commenters or see re-posts from other bloggers. The cross-cultural exchange was instant and active online. This realization pushed me to significantly expand the scope of my thesis to include the narrative capacity of these transmedia formats. The question no longer centered solely on the relatively unknown aspect of coffee’s cultural origins, but now included the question of how best to present my work in order to inspire participation; to ensure multi-cultural exchange and social resonance.
While publishing an illustrated book about Ethiopian coffee and culture would canonize my research in print, I wondered whether it truly offered the optimal way to achieve my aim for cross-cultural engagement. Access, therefore, became an enduring issue of concern and ultimately transformed the textuality of my thesis. I resolved to embrace the user-centered milieu that the digital revolution ushered in, and provide 3 versions of the project's interface: a limited edition art-book, the blog and e-book. The limited edition art-book is both a nod to the early history of books as a collectible status symbol, and, a response to the new paradigm of traditional publishing in a "post-print" era. In this sense, this medium acknowledges this shift in modality, and reasserts the book as an art object – a visual and tactile celebration of bookishness, the materiality of paper, sculptural forms, and artistic expression. Since the book’s form offered a physical embodiment of art’s interdisciplinary nature, it also allowed me to echo the multiple theories at play within the project, while evoking a sense of nostalgia that befits the slow process of coffee ceremonial rituals.

Conversely, the convenience of the e-book not only satisfies the technologic status quo, but also hints to the disconnected and individualized coffee drinking experience familiar to the West. In a downloadable format, A Culture of Coffee can also be accessed on mobile devices and e-readers. Although it replicates the stylistic attributes of a book, it eschews its temporal rigidity and gravitas, in exchange for a virtual transcendence. With its hypertext and multimedia function, the e-book satiates an instant need, much like those disposable cups of coffee purchased on-the-go. Both are casual and relatively affordable alternatives to their traditional prototypes. And just as the to-go cup provides a quick and easy caffeine fix, so does the e-book disseminate information.
The tumblr blog, has remained A Culture of Coffee's vital pulse, with a steady flow of user-submitted and research-related content. The blog format is arguably the most dynamic component of my thesis. Currently, 137 posts, over 100 images, and several videos on the origins of our global coffee culture (with particular focus on the Ethiopian coffee ceremony) have been transmitted. This space uniquely offers what the art-book and e-book can not: the ongoing ability to create new content, which allows the project to stay relevant and evolve. Channeling the research into these 3 very specific interfaces offered the project several advantages. First, the incorporation of new media counterbalanced the reintroduction of historical data and traditional artifacts, in turn, creating new form. Secondly, the mediums offered the ability to provide varying degrees of accessibility according to user preference, which enhances the reception and transmission of the work, encourages dialogue, and stimulates community interaction. Both factors conspire to increase the overall cultural value of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Essentially, A Culture of Coffee follows the intersections of Ethiopia’s cultural inheritance and the impact of technology on narrative remediation, reconnecting today's population of coffee drinkers to a little-known source. Using Regis Debray's theories on mediology as my methodological framework, I conceptualize the efficacy and historical manifestations of coffee’s cultural transmission and use the current mediasphere to reassert the Ethiopian coffee ceremony into contemporary dialogue. The appeal of this reintegration is in its potential for resurrecting wilted networks of exchange formerly lost to history, now re-established through the transformative powers of technology, namely the internet. Though, technology and culture are often seen as opposing forces, my methodology avoids this
problematic premise and instead offers a welcome opportunity to absolve disciplinary boundaries. Bucking tradition and the subjective qualifiers of "noble" (traditional; print) versus "lower" (digital; social media), I adopt a more inclusive and revolutionary process of engaging and disseminating research (Debray 23).

The consequences of a lost and/or diminished "aura" with regard to the "original" cultural artifact are examined using the works of Bolter and Grusin, as well as Walter Benjamin, respectively. Johanna Drucker, a noted theorist on the evolving modalities of books, has provided insight on the aesthetic and technological implications of the art book in the process of narrative production. In this regard, the telecommunicative properties of my art book, blog, and e-book are deeply scrutinized. I assess the utility of presentations and interactive features based on their ability of to adequately capture and transmit a notion of cultural essence, while providing different user experiences and changing the reception of a cultural tradition.

Remediating the Ethiopian coffee ceremony through A Culture of Coffee is a reaction to the increasing digitization of culture, and, an act of creation, itself. I orchestrate this interdisciplinary system of engagement, in the hopes of communicating ritual meaning to a broader audience. As an Ethiopian-American, my aim is to bring Americans and other Westerners into the fold, while simultaneously working to draw uninitiated Ethiopians into a technological environment, where culture could be equally adapted and preserved. As such, it became necessary to construct a space (or spaces) that would reflect the multi-dimensionality of the thesis, its various forms and interrelated objectives (see Appendix).
The project’s emphasis on transmedia establishes a new model of techno-cultural engagement. The term offers a digital entryway for ideal reflection, a multi-modal approach to discourse through engagement. In this heightened mediological demonstration, both culture and technology are transmuted to achieve the best of both worlds, a bridge for cross-cultural exchange and a method for enhancing the reception of this unique historical narrative.
CHAPTER 1: COFFEE, BOOKS & THE SOCIAL SPHERE

“The space of the book is both intimate and public at the same time; it mediates between private reflection and broad communication...” - Johanna Drucker in The Book As Art (2007)

The social evolution of coffee and books offer intriguing parallels with significant intersections and powerful historical examples of cultural transmission. The examination of this relationship offered many insights reflected in the project. Both have been essential in shaping the collective consciousness of modern society. As agents of cultural transformation, they have represented material and spirit, engine and energy for millennia. The universality of coffee has certainly put it on par with the reverence of books within the cult of objects (Debray 141). In other words, the magnitude of influence that the two have had within our global culture is remarkably vast and far-reaching. Each had its early foundations within religion, which only added to the allure of their perceived cultural value. As instruments of transcendence, the book was the embodiment of the word of god or an earthly equivalent, while the simulative effects of coffee were utilized by the devout to perform extensive meditative prayers. Both books and coffee went through a process of diffusion that took centuries before becoming incorporated into centralized power structures (Eisenstein 236). Today they are universally embraced and have become accessible to many.

Coffees adoption into European society started from the ground up, it was first introduced through the movement of trade and foreign elements. Revered for its medicinal properties, it was often found in apothecaries and pharmacies. Later as its social influence strengthened, the demand for coffee increased. The social forces that fueled coffees proliferation was also a large part of what made it so popular. Whether its ritualized gathering was done for ceremonial
purposes, political dialogue, or to strengthen social bonds, the communal aspect of coffee-drinking became a prototype for early coffee houses and modern coffee culture.

In his essay *Coffee As A Social Drug*, Steven Topik suggests a strong link between the introduction of coffee and the development of the “social sphere” in Europe. Its proliferation touched all levels of society, trade, and influenced most political and social structures. As such a transformative social technology, it further echoes the impact of books. The commodification of books and coffee is another close point of intersection. Topik even goes so far as to suggest a link between the introduction of coffee and the spread of commercial capitalism in Europe (Topik 91). As they were channeled through the same networks of exchange (trade routes, city centers, and mercantile ports), the impact of their dissemination also mirrored one another.

The consumption of books and coffee remained concentrated in urban centers until after the advent of the railroad, which brought about more movement of people and information between city centers and rural peripheries (Eisenstein 240-242). It's interesting that coffee was introduced to the West at a point when the capacity of publishing technology was steadily increasing. By the time coffee found its way onto the tables of the European aristocracy in the 16th century, it had been over 100 years since Guttenberg's printing machine revolutionized the world of publishing. The increased production and availability of books, coupled with the shared experience that coffee service required, increased the stimulation of the social and made conditions ripe for a new age of Enlightenment.
As books informed the far off imaginings of life in the Orient, the caffeinated effects of this dark libation only added its mysterious appeal. After the initial fetishizing of coffee, the brew became less exotic, gaining popularity among the masses for its sobering effects, and ability to uplift the exhausted worker. Eventually, coffee houses became widespread in Europe. They not only fulfilled the need for low cost coffee, but also provided a space for social interaction and the public exchange of information.

While books continued to keep a record of the soul of man, coffee persisted in stirring it. In his essay *The Book As Symbolic Object*, Regis Debray describes “the book as a symbolic matrix, the affective and mental schematization in whose dependence we bind ourselves more less unconsciously to the world of meaning” (Debray 141). Books reflected back to us our world of meaning, while coffee offered an opportunity for free contemplation. As bibliographic scholar Elizabeth Eisenstein eloquently suggests, books transformed the "nature of collective memory” (Eisenstein 242). Coffee's addition only added fuel to this metamorphosis, creating a perfect storm of social and intellectual dynamism. During the European Enlightenment, the coffee house came to embody the social center, where propaganda, politics, philosophy, and the latest mercantile information could be circulated. Naturally, coffee began to indirectly effect literary content, inspiring novels, sagas, and the introduction of the educational pamphlet. The pamphlet served as the informative arm of the coffee house, condensed to a miniature paper version. As printed thought infiltrated the public sphere, the influx of new ideas propagated newer ones. This improvement and expansion of the quality of written works, in turn, heightened the level of collective consciousness.
Yet, as the printed word drew closer to its simulant, both remained dependent on the evolution of technology. After all, both books and coffee are transformative parts of our culture, but they are still tied to human innovation. Topik, reaffirms this when he makes the connection between coffee and computers:

It has become so integrated into the new computer telecom age that one of the leading computer programs is called ‘Java’ because programmers required gallons of coffee to develop their codes. And coffeehouses have gone global. Cybercafés are the umbilical cords of their patrons. Being centers for newspapers and face-to-face conversation and gossip for centuries …(Topik 100).

Coffee and books initiated the expansion of trade networks that became necessary due to their increasing demand. These channels of movement, thought, and goods, laid the foundation for the virtual network that would later become the World Wide Web. The Internet is the result of the social revolutions brought about by these agents of cultural transmission.

Considering the striking parallels of books and coffee, their relationship offers a compelling model for exploring the impact of new technologies on our socio-cultural understanding. It also indicates that the power of these mediums is not reduced or determined by their form. The material nature of these artifacts was historically shaped by their utility and dictated by their social function. The bean was roasted and then brewed to enhance its chemical properties and expedite its intake. The codex replaced scrolls so that more information could be disseminated quickly and in a more convenient manner. Man’s need for greater social exchange increased the desire for more efficient means of communication.

As moveable-type machines replaced scribes and illuminators, and coffee machines replaced traditional brewing methods, the social significance of books and coffee have persisted.
But certainly changed. Technology continues to find faster, more efficient methods for sharing and receiving information, and as it does, the preparation and experience of drinking coffee is expedited and altered, as well. The utility of the two remains essential even as the cultural spaces they inhabit become outdated. Regardless of form, e-book or scroll, slow coffee ritual or quick disposable cup, they continue to imbue the symbolic meanings we have ascribed them. Their power of transmission and potential for cultural resonance has not been altered by their modality. Interestingly enough, the flow of culture works both ways. The Western cafe culture that found its roots in the ceremonial practices of the Orient, have now begun to return to their point of origin. Now the trends of North America and Europe are influencing coffee-production in the developing world. As such, demand impacts supply and culture comes full circle.
CHAPTER 2: THE ETHIOPIAN COFFEE CEREMONY

Before it was introduced to the rest of the world and became the trendiest drink known to man, coffee was born and brewed in Ethiopia. It took centuries to spread its distinctive social and stimulating qualities. But once it was introduce, coffee skyrocketed from cult-like status to universal phenomenon. In every society, it has earned a unique value, driving us towards greater social understanding and collective development. In its birthplace of Ethiopia, there is much cultural significance attached to the consumption of coffee (Schivelbusch 71). Coffee, in Ethiopia, is as iconic as tea is to East. The ceremonious nature of this time-honored tradition is as much a symbol of national identity as the Japanese tea ceremony. Coffee is at the center of social life in Ethiopia. The weight of its presence within the society, its symbiotic relation to the people, is as perennial as the crop itself, which grows indigenously in the Northern mountains and the southern lowlands. Like the teas of China and Japan, so cherished was the consumption of coffee, that its preparation became an exalted affair.

The coffee ceremony is both aesthetic ritual and secular practice. The hot infusion of dark water that resembles the commonly enjoyed “cup of joe,” we know today, is a technology that took centuries to shape and develop one cup at a time. Coffee, also known as bunna/bunn/bunni, is uniquely entangled within a complex global network of historical trade, politics and human interaction within Ethiopian culture (Pankhurst 535). The country of Ethiopia has a storied reputation for hospitality. Since our earliest interactions with the oldest of global powers, Ethiopians (also, historically known as Abyssinian or Habesha peoples) have held a high regard for the concept of the collective experience. The social bonds of family, community, authority, and religion, are profoundly important. The interactions and exchanges at the core of these
relationships have only been strengthened by the incorporation of coffee as both a form of sustenance and entertainment. All other aspects of Ethiopian culture that are now familiar to the West have come to center around, or take inspiration from, the communal representations embodied in the coffee ceremony. The fundamental aspects of what, for the purposes of this thesis, will be described as the “traditional” Ethiopian coffee ceremony, are given in overview with full awareness of the problematic that such a generalization presents.

Ethiopia, being such a diverse country, with more than 80 different subcultures, presents serious hegemonic implications with this type of nomenclature. However, without delving too deeply into the sociopolitical milieu in Ethiopia and its 4000 year-old history, I offer an abbreviated background on the country for context. Ethiopia has had a long-standing practice of violent power struggles for controlling rule over its regional kingdoms. The feudalist remnants of this traditional governing structure are still visible today and the majority of the population is made up of three distinct ethnic groups: the Oromo (Southern regions), Tigray and Amhara. Despite ongoing ethnic tensions, there remains an understanding of a “common” coffee ceremony that has come to embody the broader national identity. A social visit to any household in Ethiopia, be it a modest rural hut or a posh home in the capital city of Addis Ababa, will provide similar presentations. Ceremony differences vary only in wares and linguistic terms, but not in intention or practice.

This “traditional” ceremony has come to be widely accepted because it represents the iconic process for preparing Ethiopian coffee, as it has come to be known by the outside world. This slow-coffee ritual is an ancient custom and, through internal and external intermediaries, the
process has gradually been refined over time, finally evolving into the method of extraction and consumption we know today. First, the beans are roasted beans, then ground and brewed in hot water. The traditional ceremony is a delicate presentation, which is performed in layers, rather than chronological steps. It demonstrates multi-sensory elements, coupling the requisite social interaction with an orchestrated practice by (typically) a mistress of ceremony.

Before the standardization of this method, there have been several other iterations of coffee consumption. The modern infusion, as we know it, developed after many earlier prototypes. *Hershra*, for example, is an infusion made of leaves from the coffee plant. *Kutti* is the decoction of the hull of dried coffee, while coffee served with butter is called, *buna kala*, or coffee slaughter, for which coffee beans are fried instead of being roasted. Most of these versions have persisted among different subcultures that incorporate their own unique twist on the social
customs, celebrations, and rites of passages associated with the ceremony. I document a few of these variations across ethnic and regional contexts in my thesis, through field research collected in the Ethiopian coffee producing regions of Borana, Yirgacheffe, Hararr, Dire Diwa, and Sidamo.

Figure 1.2: A woman preparing the *Buna Kala* “Coffee Slaughter” ceremony in Borana.
The traditional coffee ceremony in Ethiopia is a far cry from the speedy espresso counters of Italy, or the quick-fire lattes at the neighborhood Starbucks. It is ritual practice turned performance art (part cultural inheritance, part social trend); an extended process that lasts an hour or more, depending on the hosts preferred pace. In its most simplified form, the ceremony master (usually a woman), prepares all aspects of the staging and preparation of the ritual.
Although Ethiopian men enjoy the ceremony, coffee is definitively considered female domain. It is a rare occurrence to see men present in the process of the ceremony, until it is time to be served. Yet, regardless of the participants’ gender, the presentation is considered a great source of pride.

In brief, the essential ceremonial objects used in the Ethiopian coffee ceremony are the following: cinis (traditional style, diminutive coffee cups without handles), jebenna (traditional coffee pot), mortar & pestle, qétéma (grass reeds or mat), flowers, ittan (incense), rak’boat serving tray (vs. basin), and berchuma (traditional style three legged wooden stool). There is always a very hallowed atmosphere to a traditional coffee ceremony. Conversation is welcome, but always hushed, as if in the presence of an elder, where tone and decibel is humbly reduced to show respect. This is never expressly demanded, though.

The ceremony, itself, and the preparation that unfolds, typically goes like this: The hostess consecrates a space to stage the ceremony. An area with the most natural light and ventilation, usually close to a window or door, is selected as the ceremony site. Nature is ever present in the ceremony. Traditionally, a bundle of long grass reeds from the papyrus plant, known as qétéma, are scattered loosely as a ceremonial carpet. In the absence of this, available green foliage, or a artificial grass mat are used. Some women even add flowers or flower petals, for their added aesthetic appeal and sweet aroma. The small berchuma stool and relatively sized table set with 6 small bowl-like cups, or cinis, are assembled in the demarcated area. Then coals are heated on a small, open-faced stove.
After this sacramental designation of space, the woman begins to assemble her necessary wares. She sits on the *berchuma*, traditionally made of wood, but always no more than a foot and a half off the ground. In front of her sits the *rak’boat*, as it is known in the south, or the *gända*, as it is
called in the north, a small wooden table used for preparation and central display (Pankhurst 533). It is similar in height to the stool and is sometimes decorated with metal studs along the trim, a design element that alludes to the country’s Islamic influences. The traditional Ethiopian coffee cups known as *cinis*, are then lined up orderly on the top of the work tray’s surface, according to the positioning of the guests. The cups, similar in design to traditional Japanese teacups, are small cylindrical chalices usually made of earthenware, but they can also be imported porcelain. Typically, *cinis* are made without a handle, as if carefully designed to comfortably fit in one hand.

Figure 1.7: A traditional set of coffee cups or *cinis*. 
A small open-faced stove containing freshly heated coals is placed adjacent to the display. When the coals are sufficiently heated, one coal is selected and placed onto an incense burner. This provides an added sensory layer to the ceremony, a blend of taste and smells is created as crystalized frankincense wafts through the air, often long after coffee has been consumed. The distinct scent of the ittan incense is also encountered during ceremonies within the Ethiopian Orthodox church (Pankhurst 533). In both instances, the aroma of the smoke signifies to attendants the commencement of the ceremony and the auspiciousness of the occasion.
The fresh coffee beans used for the ceremony are always hand-washed and this process may be done in front of the guests or in advance, at the discretion of the hostess. The ceremony’s performer sorts through the beans, removing undesirables, then washing and drying the intended batch. Afterward, a thin metal pan is placed atop the hot coals on the stove and the beans are roasted.
As the beans begin to crackle, the smell of fresh roasted coffee permeate the air. The hostess then, removes the smoking pan of roasted beans and circles the room, offering up smoke to each of her guests and wafting the nutty aroma their way. This act, a gesture of hospitality and good tidings, is done first for the eldest in the room, continuing from one participant to the next, in accordance to age. By the time the youngest person gets a sampling, the room is filled with smiles, as everyone enjoys the coffee roasting and anticipates the rest to come.

![Image of incense and roasting coffee](image)

**Figure 2.1:** Incense smoke mixing with the smoke from roasting coffee.

Once everyone has smelled the roasted beans, they are taken off of the stove and ground in a large wooden mortar. From there, the beans are poured into the jebenna, a traditional Ethiopian coffee pot. This ceramic container has a slender neck and round base, with a handle and spout, sometimes one on either side. Water is added into the jebenna and the pot is placed on the coals.
As the coffee boils and the grounds settle, the decoction is poured into the cups. As the performer/hostess attends to each *cini* she pours with focus extending her arm and tilting the jebenna for maximum precision and grace. When the coffee has been poured and her tray is full, the hostess serves each guest his or her cup, again, starting with the oldest person in the room. It is a procession of respect, repeated multiple times. The guests are offered no less than three rounds of bunna to drink.
Figure 2.3: A woman pouring a freshly brewed cup of traditional Ethiopian coffee.
Legend & History

Ethiopia’s central geographic location, its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea, made it a key point of trade amongst the world’s oldest empires. These established opportunities for foreign visitors, the influence and impact of these early cross-cultural interactions are reflected in the diversity of the Ethiopian people. Though, one of the first empires to convert to Christianity in the 4th century B.C., the country has built upon the sedimentary layers of its polytheistic beginnings. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam states it best in his article *Let’s Have Coffee*:

*Ethiopian Judaism, Ethiopian Christianity, Ethiopian Islam, and Ethiopian Animist religions are superimposed on the preexistent Ethiopian diversity as greater unifying factors…Some interpretations for the peculiarity of the great religions of Ethiopia see it as the juxtaposition of these religions on a pagan base* (Wolde-Mariam 9).

Indeed it is this religious diversity and synthesis that has manifested itself in many aspects of the traditional ceremony, which functioned as both a useful brewing method and ceremonial offering to spirits.

The coffee shrub was first nurtured to life in the highlands of the Ethiopian rainforest. The country’s unique geography and climate conditions have made it a breeding ground for some of the most diverse species of the coffee plant. The tropical rainfall, topography and altitudes have allowed for the natural presence of both highland and southern lowland coffees with significant variations in taste and appeal. The differences in extreme temperature and climate conditions, even within short distances, account for varying rainy and harvest seasons. In most areas, the painstaking labor of harvesting the crop, takes an average of 5 years (until the plant reaches maturity).
Kaffa, a province in southwestern Ethiopia, is believed to be where the coffee plant first originated. Some entomologists also believe that it is the source of the word coffee. Though, other scholars have suggested that the word originated from the Arabic word *qahwah*, meaning wine. Regardless, it is important to note that coffee is called *bunna* in Ethiopia and a derivative of this word “bunn,” as it is known in the Middle East and throughout the horn of Africa. The Kaffa region in Ethiopia is considered, in this thesis, in much the same way as coffee from the Mocha islands is a marker for Indonesian culture. A reasonable correlation can be made between nomenclature and point of origin, as merchants may have called the beans Kaffa as reference to their source. There remains much debate in Ethiopia as to the exact birthplace of coffee, particularly amongst the Oromo and Kaffa peoples, where coffee plants grow wild. Still, the Ethiopian government and most institutional organizations, corroborate Kaffa’s claim as the original source of coffee.

Although, its scientific taxonomy, *Coffea Arabica*, is actually a misnomer, it has been generally accepted that coffee originated in present day Ethiopia. Steven Topik, explains this in depth, in *Coffee As a Social Drug*:

C. Arabica first appeared natively in Ethiopia. Coffee was a holy sacrament used by indigenous peoples to honor the god Waqa in communal ceremonies. The Oromo accepted Waqa’s gift from naturally appearing trees; they did not themselves plant… It was nature’s bounty picked and enjoyed by humans …(Topik 86).

Furthermore, what is commonly known as *bun* or *bunna*, is also called *tukke* by the Sidamo peoples in Southern Ethiopia. Outside of Ethiopia, coffee is known as *kahveh* in Turkish and *kahwah* in Arabic.
In his article, *Mythological and Historical Background of Coffee*, the historian Dr. Berhanu Abeba cites three legends that may provide clues as to the influences behind this amalgamated practice we now know as the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. The first, a legend originally collected by the French botanist and cultural anthropologist, Jacques Mercier, sets three men, Abol, Atona and Baraka, wandering in the desert in search of god, “… hoping to receive the manna (food) from the sky” (Abebe 13). Starving, they continued without proof of god, until they could no longer continue. Finally god appears before them and reveals his salvation, to each man; two plants- kat (qat) and coffee. Abeba explains how this legend was eventually incorporated into the ceremony, itself. He says that the layered consumption that takes place during the ceremony comes from the story, where three rounds of coffee symbolize the three men in the legend. As Abeba puts it, “The first infusion is called abol, from the Semetic awl: first, the second atona (or tona) from the Semetic itnin: two; the third Baraka stands for blessing, a rite that takes place at the end of a coffee session” (Abebe 14-15). Abeba, also cites the more widely circulated 15th century story of Kaldi.

As the legend goes, a young goat-herder by the name of Kaldi was the first to make the discovery. Like many traditional herders, the solitude of long treks through the mountains were made bearable with the aid of a handmade bamboo pipe, or washint, used to entertain the herder and signal the herd. On this particular occasion, Kaldi played the washint but his herd did not answer to his call. When he finally tracked them down, he found them dancing and jumping about on their hind legs, possessed with a wild vitality. Upon the next tour, he was intrigued to find the herd back at the shrubs where he first found them dancing. He chewed on every part of
the plant until realizing that the berries held the spirited chemical property we now know as caffeine. After his experimentation, the novelty of the awakened sensation inspired Kaldi to share his discovery with an elder. The information circulated through a social chain before finally reaching the monks at the monastery, who heralded its properties for sustaining their ability to conduct extensive meditative prayers.

As a last explanation for coffee’s origins, Dr. Abeba points to a folktale, originating from Yemen. According to the story, a 16th century ascetic named Abu Baker, noted for introducing the Sufi order of the Qadiriyya to Harar, Ethiopia, discovers coffee during one of his travels. While taking a rest under the shade of a coffee plant, he tastes one of its berries and notices its stimulative effects. Abebe, asserts that the “… formal way of drinking coffee might have started in Harar, Ethiopia. Later on, the practice spread to the Middle East and South-east Asia” (Abebe 14).

Unlike its contemporaries, beer and wine, it was the exhilarated sense of clarity and alertness that coffee offered, coupled with its storied origins that helped to market its appeal in Europe. Topik accounts for the spread of coffee and its impact on cultural goods:

Coffee’s prestige, distinction, and exotic aura were enhanced by the use of novelty stated materials newly introduced into Europe in the coffee ritual. Porcelain cups from China, pots made of silver from Peru, tobacco form America, and sugar from African islands and Brazil were appealing companions for this social drug (Topik 91-92).

Quickly, coffee became the liquid “blakamore,” the quintessential oriental accent, a fashionable marker of elite status, refinement and luxury. The Ethiopian roots of these ritualistic eccentricities may have helped propagate this exotic fantasy (Schivelbusch 19).
Ritual Origins

“The peace offering ceremony of coffee beans ... the essential cult of our earliest culture” – Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin in Kaffa Coffee

The coffee ceremony is one of the most iconic presentations of Ethiopian culture. Yet unlike most social activities, it is a domain governed almost exclusively by women. Much is lacking, in terms of previous research, on the essential role of the other sex within this ancient and revered tradition. Some correlations have been made between ritual worship of nature and the feminine spirit. In his article, Kaffa Coffee, Tesgaye Gebre-Medhin, suggests that “the name KAFA is inherited from the hieroglyphic noun KA AFA … [which] means the earth or plant (plants) of God (Gebre-Medhin 21). These early practices within the cult of original coffee cultures were done in worship of the goddess Etbara, also known as Etete by the Oromo peoples. Reverence of Etete (Amharic for “mother”) was very widespread throughout the Mediterranean.

As Etbara, she may be virtually unknown, but this deity, also known as Isis, is a pervasive icon across cultures. Gebre-Medhin encapsulates this point well when he describes her as:

... perhaps the most ancient earth mother goddess of the world...the longest worshiped mythological power in the Afro-European, Semitic and the Middle Eastern literatures to have closely monopolized her attachments upon the coffee ceremonies and upon other Mediterranean cultural rituals before the advent of Judeo-Christianity and Islam (Gebre-Medhin 21).

The ceremonial coffee practice was originally performed outdoors, under the Adbar Warka, also known as Oda or Boaobab, shrine trees used as a means of communing with god. Gebre-Medhin suggests the ceremony’s three-part transfiguration of the bean to be a demonstration of the symbolic relationship between, god, man, and nature. The brunt or boiled “sacrifice” of the bean,
the accession of smoke, and the acknowledgement of god’s bounty at consumption, was done in hopes of bringing reciprocal rains down from heaven and sustaining life. This practice, which is still performed in a similar manner by the Oromo, was later adopted by Judea-Christian and Muslims in Ethiopia and brought indoors. To this point, Gebre-Medhin asserts that the modern-day hostess of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony would, in that time, be viewed as “a kind of human extension of the goddess Adbar herself (Gebre-Medhin 21)

These early belief systems became the foundation for the later developments we know today as zar spirits. According to Rita Pankhurst’s seminal work *The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Consumption in Ethiopia*, the zar cults, which began in the northern highlands of Ethiopia, centered on the belief of spirits having the ability to take possession. To this day, some Christians, Muslims and Beta Israel consider coffee’s viscous black liquid to be the blood of the zar spirits. Under this belief, the ritual elements of the traditional coffee ceremony were incorporated into spiritual practice. During zar rites, Pankhurst describes, “presenting the smoking coffee beans on the metal griddle so that the aroma can be inhaled, to simulate recitations and prayers, or to fumigate the person” (Pankhurst 535). In this respect, the spiritual elements of the traditional ceremony are amplified; *rak’boat* (ceremonial stand) becomes alter and smoke conjures the supernatural.

For the Oromo people of Ethiopia, particularly those who live in the coffee producing regions like Sidamo, Guji, Yirgacheffe, Harar, and Kaffa, coffee has been intimately interwoven into their cultural traditions. One prominent ritual still practiced today, is *buna kala* or *bunna kila*, which means “coffee slaughter.” The Oromo believed coffee to be symbolic of the
flesh, and this sacrifice, where the coffee beans are fried in butter, is done for most celebratory occasions, rites of passage, meetings, and marriage proposals, as a ritual of consummation.

It is remarkable how many other old themes have continued to persist across years of practicing the coffee ceremony: the burnt offering, consideration of elders and communal acts of worship, among others. Regardless of the varying belief systems that have perpetuated the ceremony through the ages, its modification and appropriation is evidence of its contemporary legacy. Over the years, coffee has become more social function than spiritual practice, although the traces of its early rites are still evident today.
Contemporary Legacy

Coffee has indeed become Ethiopia’s symbol of national identity. It is the drink of the everyman and the most iconic display of their signature hospitality. The dissemination of coffee has been a historic agent of cohesion and cultural exchange for Ethiopia’s diverse society, but much has been lost in the maintenance of the original traditions throughout the rest of the world. In today’s café culture, most identifiable in America and Europe, the act of drinking coffee is centered on the individual; drinks are made to order and each consumer decides his or her specific tastes. The once-social epicenters of information have become more like offices and libraries, a place to bring your book or laptop, sip silently and sit alone.

Not surprisingly, these Western style cafes have existed in Ethiopia since World War II. Some of the oldest coffee shops still exist today, but remain neglected by the city’s young urbanites, who prefer instead to drink at the newest and trendiest cafes. One example is a recent franchise with a familiar name: Kaldi’s. The chain popped up in recent years, around the capital city of Addis, and bears a similar style and aesthetic to Starbucks – complete with frappuccinos on the menu. Kaldi’s is one of many cafés sprinkled throughout the capital and well into the outskirts of the city. On almost every street, people living below the poverty line (who comprise the majority of the population) have found themselves priced out of the new global coffee market. Those who can not afford to spend 15 Ethiopian Birr (less than .75 cents) on macchiatos and lattes – fashionable, foreign markers of the countries modernity – have found an alternative.
Recently, creative entrepreneurs have established “pop-up cafes”, made of plastic trap or an amalgam of found materials. These pop-up cafes offer cups of coffee in the traditional brewing manner and charge roughly 2 Birr per *cini*. It’s an interesting emergence, as well as an ethical business model. The traditional method of brewing is actually the best way to extract the most caffeine from the beans. So it turns out the cheapest “cup of Joe” in the city actually provides the customer with more stimulation than the higher-end establishments that typically use machines. Elements of the traditional ceremony such as utensils, grass, and incense have been incorporated into the makeshift cafes, as well. These aesthetic and aromatic elements are more about ambiance and marketing than ritual significance, but they still allude to the ceremony’s once-symbolic meaning.

At present, it seems the legacy of Ethiopian coffee rests in a precarious position. Commercial capitalism has influenced and adopted what was once an exclusive cultural inheritance. Many Ethiopians today, especially those in the urban center of Addis, are far removed from the coffee plant’s relationship to the land and the sacrificial rites associated with its harvest. Instead, growing chasms of economic inequality have been affected by the commodification of a good once considered sacred.
CHAPTER 3: FIELD WORK IN ETHIOPIA

As the central figure driving the development of *A Culture of Coffee*, it was essential that I explore coffee at the source and on the ground. I traveled to Ethiopia, to trace back the historical networks of coffee trade and cultural diffusion and seek out primary sources for my academic research. In addition to countless hours spent researching in the archives of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Addis Ababa University, I also spent one week traveling to the coffee producing regions of Sidamo, Yirgacheffe, Harar, Dire Diwa, and Borana, where I was able to visit coffee farms and co-operatives. These direct visits allowed me to connect directly with the people whose lives are so closely intertwined with the coffee trade and whose cultural traditions are a direct reflection of the history that my thesis emphasizes.

![Figure 2.4: A woman pours the buna kala-roasted beans, fried in butter on flat bread.](image)

Figure 2.4: A woman pours the *buna kala*-roasted beans, fried in butter on flat bread.
Though, this field work resulted in a great deal of notes, interviewing and literary insight, I also found great opportunities for visual documentation. I developed a collection of pertinent photographs, including several images of *jebennas* within the IES’s archives. These artifacts evidence important links between the country’s traditional history and coffee culture over time. They also provide wonderful examples of the regional variations in jebenna styles, while demonstrating the gradual evolution of the pot’s overall design, as the centerpiece of the coffee ceremony.
Perhaps, most importantly, the photographs I collected and research I performed during my time in Ethiopia were an integral part of this thesis’s interactive development. Through the project’s online blog *A Culture of Coffee*, I was able to share my findings and connect my audience to the subject-matter using multimedia and social media outlets. Despite the remote location of my research, others were able to experience the cross-cultural connections behind coffee right along with me. Even from the comfort of their homes, I could reach coffee enthusiasts and neophytes, alike, by presenting the artifacts, images and information online. As such, cultural transmission became not only the subject of this thesis, but an on-going aspect of the project, as well. By studying the imprint of books and the influence of coffee culture over time, utilizing emerging technology afforded me the opportunity to be unhindered
by time and space. Thus, an added layer of the project’s modality eventually surfaced.

Essentially, *A Culture of Coffee 2.0.*
CHAPTER 4: REPRODUCING THE RITUAL: THE COFFEE CEREMONY IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

As the most lucrative agricultural commodity, coffee started from its birthplace in the highlands of Ethiopia and slowly made its way around the world. At one time, the Ethiopian coffee ceremony was faith and religion embodied in practice. Its cultural diffusion can be observed from its development the changes in brewing practices, utensil design, ritual method and consumption. Similarly, its cultural symbolism has been constructed and reconstructed, layer-by-layer. The social aspect of drinking coffee was a driving force behind its adoption in Middle Eastern, and later European, cafe cultures. The cultivation of this seemingly inherent practice was first nurtured in Ethiopia, and propelled by ceremonial rites that have been passed down through generations and across cultures. Coffee’s history and present-day ubiquity only add to the allure of a libation that has affected the world over one cup at a time.

The benefit of A Culture of Coffee project is that it provides an opportunity to reconnect the beneficiaries and the pro-generators of this latent socio-cultural network. Basically bringing the average consumer closer to their everyday “cup of Joe” and the Ethiopian coffee enthusiasts back to their cultural origins. Through the art book, blog, and e-book, this connection will not only be established, but also expanded upon exponentially. Yet, before I explain the benefits that a transmedia exploration of coffee culture offers, it is first worth examining the potential consequences behind these attempts at transmission, itself – or re-transmission, particularly through digital or electronic means, in order to better understand what is potentially gained and lost in this process of reproducing a cultural artifact.
Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," posits a potential implication critical to this project. In the transmission of a cultural artifact (i.e. the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony), the technology employed to develop *A Culture of Coffee* has the potential to threaten the practice, itself, when presented or reproduced in the format of a book, e-book, blog, etc. In more direct terms, Benjamin explains:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be (Benjamin 2).

For the purpose of this thesis, let us equate Benjamin's concept of "mechanical reproduction" as the remediated versions of the ceremony as will be demonstrated through the book, blog, and e-book. By this assertion, the virtual representation, or absence, of the "original" may bring about questions of "authenticity". Benjamin goes on to elaborate with the following:

> We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual--first magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function…the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in rite, the location of its original use value (Benjamin 2).

Although, the coffee ceremony fails to embody the absolute terms of the sort of finite art object or painting Benjamin refers to, it remains an active traditional rite and therefore inseparable from its artistic and cultural provenance. As a performed social practice, the coffee ceremony’s "originality" was and is more malleable to reproduction, modification, and influence. Since the historical value of the artifact rests on its authenticity, the practice of the ritualized coffee ceremonies, which persists to this day, is a testament to its endurance as an art object. Though more importantly, as an inherited cultural link in a generational chain of ritual consumption and
beliefs structures, the ceremony is a better example of cultural recursion, than the simulacrum that Benjamin warns of.

This clear demonstration of cultural heritage allows us to avoid the question of "authenticity" and focus more on the issue of "aura." The decorative and ritualistic aspects of the coffee ceremony, not to mention their inherent social function, differs not only regionally, but from household to household, where the unofficial mistress of coffee ceremonies is free to customize the sensory aspects of the performance according to her taste, style, and artistry. These unique elements essentially make any invocation of the traditional ceremony—the first, original production, immediately authentic and never truly reproducible. It would be equivalent to an attempt to taste or collect every type, species or variation of the coffee bean; far too many exist to catalogue, while new species are constantly being discovered and hybrid blends are produced endlessly. Securing an "original" source for a ritual practice, like the Ethiopian coffee ceremony, would be like dropping several pebbles in a pond, and then attempting to identify the first point of impact. In the end, the particular source is no more significant than the ripples it creates. They, in turn, converge and overlap, representing a larger system at work.

Likewise, if we were to ignore the scientific evidence pointing to coffee's provenance in Ethiopia, the irrefutable amount of biodiversity, the countless species of unclassified, indigenous coffee plants, the fact remains that coffee is a central theme in Ethiopian culture. The country has long-standing traditions of ritualized ceremony and cultural practices based on the production, consumption, and sharing of coffee, which continue to endure to this day. The proliferation of these shared social customs, within Ethiopia, and eventually to the world, suggests that those
original "ripples" of coffee culture became waves of cultural diffusion.

Rather than isolating points of origin and discovery, it is more important to take inventory of the multi-directional channels within this network of cultural transmission and the actors (merchants, religious leaders, farmers, etc.) that were essential in shaping today’s practices. Through various technological platforms, the project manipulates form and expands the impact of these relationships across time and physical space. This representation is essentially a form of reproduction, placing "…the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (Benjamin 2). Indeed, the fact that Ethiopia’s centrality to the coffee story has gone unacknowledged for so long, suggests that remediation would do much to reaffirm cultural values.

This detachment and loss of the original state, the traditional ritual and sensory elements of the live ceremony, is not unlike what is lost with the contemporary western version of coffee as quick and convenient fix, presented in a disposable form. As a result of our globalized culture and marketplace, coffee beans harvested on one corner of the world, can be extracted and enjoyed by a consumer far removed from its process. The standard home coffee maker is far flung from the networks of labor, movement, and symbols that once sustained and signified coffee’s value. This process of commodification and cultural neutralization in the exchange of goods, particularly indigenous goods, is the reason why coffee originates from Ethiopia and gets appropriated without credit by the overwhelmingly Western coffee-consuming public. True, the disposable cup has its own virtues, but the inheritors of coffee’s heritage, have remained disconnected from the jebenna for far too long.
CHAPTER 5: RE-TRANSMISSION: EXPERIMENTS IN FORM

Although we are no longer in the mechanical age, we remain disconnected from the gravitas of original works. The electronic reproduction or the simulated images of the art book, still represent a false capture of the first. The digital reproduction, more so, lacks even the physicality that the photograph offered Benjamin in his comparative analysis. Instead, the digital presentation remains an aberration, a simulated ghost.

Clearly the notion of the “aura,” is rooted in the live performance of the ceremony. Operating in real time and place, the hostess is able to transmit all of the sensory aspects of the ceremony to her audience. This offers the opportunity to experience another unique element of the live ceremony: the feeling of evoking something ancient in the performance of the practice. This “aura” can only be accessed when one is actually participating and engaging in the ritual. It requires the presence of all five sensory elements. These are aspects of the original which could never fully be reproduced or experienced through technological means, even with a willing intermediary, like myself.

However, considering this discrepancy in cultural awareness and transmission of the coffee ceremony, the art book, e-book, and blog offer particularly useful attributes. The mediated windows that they offer allow for re-engagement on multiple levels, and their distinctive features, aid in enhancing the reception of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony as a historical meta-narrative. This all done with the intention of relating the Ethiopian coffee ceremony as Regis Debray succinctly conveyed, as a "microsystem- to the wider scale of our cultural ecology” (Debray 148).
In the article *Graphic Devices: Narrative and Narration*, Johanna Drucker, a leading expert on the communicative and aesthetic intersections of technology, provides some insights to the specific aspects, such as “graphic devices”, that can be manipulated in order to achieve the parallel objectives of *A Culture of Coffee*. She states, “graphic devices constitute their own order of meaning-producing elements. Their syntactic and semantic qualities enact a powerful rhetoric of inner-textual connections and structure” (Drucker 125). My own manipulation of these forms, my intervention as the researcher and facilitator, has been through the projects carefully curated construction. I have focused my own Ethiopian-American perspective, into a hybrid lens, critical in demonstrating the multiple networks at play within the project. I have uniquely positioned myself to bring together two disparate coffee drinking demographics, the fast-cup coffee drinking West with the slow-brew ceremony that Ethiopians have enjoyed for centuries. This transmediated diplomacy is enacted through the varying forms of the mediums I use for narrative remediation (Drucker 125).
The Art-Book

_A Culture of Coffee_, in the form of an art book, emulates the nostalgia and slowness of the traditional coffee drinking experience. The book has iconically canonized human thought. It is monumental in its symbolic and cultural value, and yet has become primitive as a technology. The function of the book has been surpassed by other devices (e-readers, tablets, mobile phones, virtual glasses, etc). It can still perform its basic function and _raison d'être_, but has been bumped significantly by other technologies deemed to be more relevant and efficient. Still it is not the usefulness of books that continues to seduce us. It is the sense of nostalgia that its innate materiality evokes, the nostalgia for time, itself. Print books offer readers an experience on two levels: _physical_ temporality (the feeling of turning a page, the weight of the paper, etc) and _symbolic_ temporality (like the concept of a tome within the canon). Each aspect of that experience is what gives books such an exalted status in society.

The natural step in this venerable evolution would be to place the book on par with a work of art. The book as art communicates form, color, value. It can do what the e-reader and blog can not--communicate meaning through its material presence, no need for activation or to even hit “power.” Presenting the Ethiopian coffee ceremony in, not just a book, but an art-book, simultaneously propels this forgotten tradition to that of bound treasure. Thus, the information about the culture and its intrinsic value is transmitted in a creative and cohesive format.
Figure 2.7: Experiments in Form: Paper Sculpture.

Figure 2.8 Experiments in Form: Examples of the Book as Art.
The E-Book

As one technology enters the communication landscape, particularly that of literature, it replicates the attributes that distinguished its predecessor. In this way, the e-book, attempts to reproduce the temporality of the book by displaying page numbers and alluding to a finite page, as opposed to an endless stream of text generated by a computer system designed to simulate pages. Still, this imitation of the book and its re-fashioned interface does not detract from its utility and convenience. In fact, its user-centered approach of allowing the textual, graphic, and audio content to be customized to the taste of the reader are noteworthy. Indeed, color, size, brightness, orientation, tone, etc., are all adjustable to user preference.

In addition, the e-book’s ability to incorporate video, animated graphics and audio, offer appealing options in capturing the ceremonial experience. Through hypertexts and multimedia, the user/viewer is able to, engage and interact with an Ethiopian coffee ceremony, without actually being present. It allows the reader to activate the cultural narrative of Ethiopia’s rich coffee culture on their own terms. It is the medium that most evokes the contemporary Western cup of coffee drinking, offering convenience, disposability, and hyper-individuality.
Figure 2.9: Experiments in From: A Culture of Coffee E-book.
The Blog

The Blog is the unifying element of *A Culture of Coffee*. It essentially offers all of the features that the e-book does, without the limitations of obsolescence or modality because its content can be added to, edited, and manipulated often. The blog sustains and regenerates, allowing any subject matter, in this case, research on Ethiopian coffee culture, to remain relevant and accessible. It can be accessed from practically any cloud-cognizant device and facilitates dialogue between author and reader, effectively expanding networked communication. More importantly, it allows the reader to participate in the act of communal dialogue, an essential aspect of the ceremony’s original social function in Ethiopia.

With these functions in mind, the art-book, e-book, and blog fittingly embody past, present, and future modalities of cultural transmission. Each option offers potential for a new way of experiencing the original coffee ceremony. In an attempt to maintain the sustainability and significance of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony, *A Culture of Coffee* makes cross-cultural inroads with remediation and narrative technology. Thus, demonstrating the resonance of an origin on the historical trajectory and evolution of a cultural artifact.
Figure 3.0: Experiments in From: Screen shot of *A Culture of Coffee* blog landing page.

Figure 3.1: Experiments in From: Screen shot of the *A Culture of Coffee* blog grid style format.
The e-book and the blog both possess the unique ability to reproduce visual and audio media components, as well as the functionality for user convenience (volume, time, color, etc.). This "on-demand"-style of information demonstrates the immediacy and accessibility of digital media; it’s what allows these technologies to surpass books as the preferred tool for sending and receiving information. But the art-book is the exception. As a traditional mode of transmission and art object, it offers a platform for cultural understanding. The book is an interface specifically chosen and designed to avoid hyper-mediation. It is it an original work of art, a bridge between past and present used to demonstrate the relationship between tradition and reproduction.

As a transmedia project, A Culture of Coffee retransmits the Ethiopian coffee ritual and reproduces the cultural value of the ceremony by introducing it to the current mediasphere. Toward this end, the art-book, blog, and e-book developed for this thesis effort offer multiple interfaces and approaches in modality, which not only aid the user in accessing cultural
significance and heritage, but also in telling their own story. If these converging technologies can be used to better explain the rich socio-cultural complexities behind coffee, its forgotten history and far-removed process, then, perhaps, the next “cup of Joe” purchased will be sipped a little slower, its long and enduring journey appreciated all the more.
A Culture of Coffee

APPENDIX
For the past two years, the majority of my graduate career has been focused on the task of unpacking the Ethiopian coffee ceremony, its cultural value and how it could be effectively transmediated through technology.

What I realized was that there are several layers to the networks enveloping this cultural product:

- **Technology**: the coffee ceremony is a tool for social exchange, in Ethiopia and the rest of the world
- **Cultural foundations**: evident in the religious rites and histories associated with the ceremony
- **Contemporary legacy**: Ethiopia’s impact on the country’s coffee culture on the global market
- **Presentation**: of coffee ceremony and its performance: mediums used for cultural re-transmission and remediation online

My methodology utilized the mediological framework that Regis Debray outlines along with the parameters for what constitutes cultural transmission in the first place.

Some of the theoretical issues that began to emerge over the course of my thesis research:

- The issues of “diminished aura”, “authenticity”, etc., the suggested consequences of reproducing a cultural artifact in the age of the “mechanical” now digital age, that Benjamin[link to quote] cautioned.
- The forms of remediation necessary in the milieu of hypermediacy that Crunstein alludes to.
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<td>Figure 1.5- A bundle of Qeléma or grass to consecrate the ceremonial space.jpg</td>
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<td>Metasebia Yoseph</td>
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<td>Debray, Régis. What is Mediology? Translation of Régis Debray.</td>
<td>Meyer, Fredrick G. ‘Notes on Wild Coffee Arabia from</td>
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