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7. Getting emotional: historic and current changes in food consumption practices viewed through the lens of cultural theories

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INTRODUCTION

Social practice theory has brought new perspectives to ‘sustainable consumption’ studies in terms of both conceptual developments and rich empirical research. One appealing and shared understanding is that practices change over time, suggesting that shifts away from current unsustainable practices toward more environmentally sound and socially just alternatives are possible. Much work has focused on how to recruit new practitioners to more ‘sustainable’ practices (Jack 2013; Plessz et al. 2014; Shove 2012). What has been called the ‘practice turn’ in consumption studies, however, also represents a turning away from cultural readings of consumption. Cultural studies have tended toward a structuralist approach, from which practice theory purposefully breaks. Rather than assume that a pre-existent ‘culture’ is made visible in social life, through symbols and rituals, practice theory suggests that everyday practices are the stuff of which social life is made of and the object of social analysis.

There was good reason to shift away from cultural approaches in relation to ‘sustainability’. Consumer culture tended to focus on conspicuous consumption and status goods, failing to grapple with much of our everyday, mundane activities that are inconspicuous yet environmentally significant (Shove and Warde 1998).¹ Spaargaren (2013; 2014) suggests that attention could be placed back on a cultural reading of consumption, as complementary to social practice theory. Building on the work of Collins (2004), Spaargaren proposes that the role of emotional energy, created during situated practices within specific contexts, could influence how practitioners are recruited by new practices. He calls for further research on the symbolic

meaning of objects, or understanding how meaning is created and how it circulates, within practices and over space and time.

The goal of this chapter is to determine whether a cultural reading of consumption, focused on symbolic meaning and associated emotional energy, can enhance social practice theory approaches toward understanding opportunities for more ‘sustainable’ consumption patterns. Food consumption is an interesting theme to consider in this respect, as the practice of preparing food in the home has changed considerably over the past century. Looking at how practices evolved in the past, and comparing them with current efforts to sway consumption practices toward more sustainable patterns, could tell us something about how more sustainable forms of consumption might be possible in the future. With this in mind, I discuss and contrast two shifts in household food consumption in the European context: the diffusion of household appliances in the past and current trends toward community-supported agriculture (CSA).

Household appliances such as washing machines and air-conditioning units have transitioned from being novelties to becoming normal items over several decades (Cooper 1998; Sahakian 2014; Shove 2003). As access to electricity increased and appliances became more readily available, chores – such as washing laundry – that had been done in factories during the period of industrialization, found their way back into more households in the early 20th century. This ‘industrial revolution in the home’ (Cowan 1976) did not happen overnight and varied greatly between urban and rural regions, by social classes, and by country (Parr 1997). Appliances, including refrigerators, microwaves, bread machines, and the like, continue to change the way food is stored and prepared in the home.

Related to the prevalence of household appliances has been the acceleration of international trade, the expansion of industrialized agriculture and processed foods, and the creation of new systems of distribution such as supermarket chains. Increasingly, consumers in industrial societies are calling for food produced closer to home and through more sustainable practices (Princen et al. 2002). Efforts to promote local and organic agriculture through CSA have grown in importance since the 1970s, and are part of a wider trend toward alternative agrofood networks (Goodman et al. 2012). A CSA offers unique modes of provision and access to fresh produce that is bought on a contractual basis, thereby reducing or eliminating mainstream retail provisioning and packaged/processed foods. What appears in a CSA vegetable basket depends on the farmer, the natural environment, and the season, not on consumer choice.

In the section that follows, I briefly outline my methodology and then introduce the conceptual framework, drawing out key research questions that will guide my analysis. In the next section, I present both case studies

and highlight my main arguments for each of them. I then discuss both cases in relation to the conceptual framework and draw some conclusions related to social practice theories and the usefulness of cultural readings of consumption.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents two case studies from Europe related to changing household food consumption practices toward greater sustainability.² Case-study research can be a relevant method when asking questions about ‘how’ and ‘why’ certain changes have taken place, while making use of multiple sources of evidence to investigate such an empirical topic. When more than one case is presented, cross-case conclusions can be drawn (Yin 2009). For the first case, I draw on secondary sources, including academic publications, as well as advertisements and other marketing materials, to understand how the shift toward the acquisition of new appliances in the home played out over time. For the second case study, I use existing literature to introduce the trend toward CSAs around the world and then focus on a particular CSA service offered in Switzerland, a country that has been a forerunner in the CSA movement.

For the CSA case, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 21 members of a Swiss CSA in 2014 to understand how practices associated with this type of food-provisioning system are playing out today. All respondents were clients of the same CSA service, which at the time had 135 members. They were contacted via the CSA provider through a regular weekly email correspondence and I arranged interviews with those members who agreed to participate either in their workplace, home, or neighborhood. Weekly observations also took place over a three-month period at the location where the CSA service is being offered: a restaurant and shop in Geneva. My interviews focused on the participants’ perceptions regarding the CSA service and how it relates to their daily practices. I did not ask questions pertaining to values or beliefs directly, but rather this information came out in my analysis of the exchanges and through my observations. The respondents varied greatly in terms of socio-economic factors and their motivation for participating, from a young woman on a meager student budget motivated by environmental concerns, to a concierge concerned about her health, to a single mother of four seeking an affordable way to provide nutritious food, to a single male business executive happy to support local producers. All of the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded; respondents remain anonymous.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Douglas and Isherwood's (1979) seminal work begins with a critique of how classical economists approach consumption studies. More than three decades later the idea of consumers as rational, independent actors, meeting needs and basing decisions on price and information is still appealing to researchers and policy makers. When related to research and practice toward greater sustainability, in both environmental and social terms, this limited vision of consumption is buoyed by the view that technological advances (existing or imagined) will resolve environmental issues, and that individual consumers need only embrace these solutions to resolve environmental problems.

As a countertrend, approaches informed by social practice theories have been gaining in popularity among a growing group of researchers focused on current unsustainable consumption patterns and practices. Earlier developments in practice theory by scholars such as Bourdieu (1979) and Giddens (1984) sought to grapple with the dichotomy between human subjectivity and social structure without entirely forgoing human agency. Since then, Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002) have furthered these discussions, the former through a Wittgensteinian approach and the latter building on Bourdieu, Giddens, Taylor, and later works by Foucault (see Chapter 1 for an overview of social practice theories of sustainable consumption).³ Contemporary researchers have differing perspectives on what constitutes a practice, and how practices play out in social life and over time, in relation to different resources and artifacts. The overarching question addressed in this chapter is whether cultural interpretations of consumption should be brought back into the practice theory discussion, noting the merits and challenges involved in doing so.

The idea of bringing culture back into the study of consumption stems from an earlier article by Wilk (2002), which makes the case for considering different theoretical readings of consumption divided into three categories – social, cultural, and individual approaches. While each approach may be flawed or partial, he argues that they may still have something to offer toward addressing global environmental problems. In relation to cultural theories, Wilk looks specifically at the role of mass media – including advertising – in terms of how cultural themes and meanings are 'hijacked' to make particular goods and services desirable. Spaargaren (2013) contributed to further revive the agency–culture debate, drawing mostly on the work of Collins (2004). Spaargaren suggests that researchers might return to objects, not solely as service providers, but as carriers of cultural meaning. For Collins, the main objects of sociological analysis are rituals, in a 'demystified' reading that includes all social

gatherings where repeated enactments of a type of relationship between people take place (Kemper 2011). It is during these interactions that meanings and values are produced, around symbols and objects, and in a dynamic interaction among people, space, and artifacts. During a ritual, a type of ‘collective effervescence’ can occur – a term Collins borrows from Emile Durkheim. From that moment onward, people carry with them ‘emotional energy’ derived from that situation, embedded in individuals and associated objects.

Spaargaren argues that such a cultural approach to sustainable consumption is both innovative and relevant as it ‘shows how norms, morals and awareness result from situated interactions in which eco-friendly symbols, objects and morals are used by individuals to gain energy and to “produce” sustainability’ (2013, p.244). Spaargaren suggests that the collective interactions discussed by Collins are similar to social practices and that the added element of emotional energy is another prism through which we can understand how people are recruited into new practices. Studying energy in terms of services and related practices has been useful (Sahakian and Steinberger 2011; Wilhite et al. 1996; Wilhite and Lutzenhiser 1999), but what about the cultural meaning and emotions associated with certain energy-intensive objects? For example, air-conditioning units are currently a status symbol among the growing middle classes in Southeast Asia (Sahakian 2014). Why is this the case and how could, say, photovoltaic panels come to generate the same positive emotional energy?

The notion of objects having cultural meaning builds on theoretical developments during the 1970s. Baudrillard (1968) proposed to understand objects as having ‘symbolic value’ in the attribution of meaning to an object, which then has ‘sign value’ in its ability to communicate this meaning to others. Douglas and Isherwood’s (1979) cultural reading positioned consumption as a form of symbolic behavior with goods coded for communication, beyond their practical uses or functional purposes. While Douglas and Isherwood also proposed rituals as moments that give meaning to goods, they considered consumption as a form of classification that reflects an organized system of social relations or social hierarchy. Goods become a way for people to make sense of their universe and are a visible part of a seemingly pre-existing culture. Collins (2004) breaks with this structuralist approach in his work and indicates a practice approach when he says: ‘My analytical strategy . . . is to start with the dynamics of situations; from this we can derive almost everything that we want to know about individuals, as a moving precipitate across situations’ (p. 4). Culture is not the source of practices; attention is placed on the actual mechanisms of how situations play out, in specific contexts.

During a ritual, positive emotions – such as feelings of ‘confidence,

elation, strength, enthusiasm, initiative in taking action' (Collins 2004, p. 49) – are what motivate us, what set us in motion in relation to that ritual and beyond that moment, through 'interaction ritual chains'. Emotional energy also charges the objects involved in a ritual. It is during these emotionally charged encounters that collective symbols are generated, which Collins describes as the 'lenses through which we see', and which become the norms and values experienced by individuals and the group, even if 'the pathway to those experiences is deeply social' (2004, p. 374). Spaargaren (2014) relates this to practice theory, positing that emotional energy may be a key factor in attracting new practitioners to a practice. Further, emotional energy may help us understand how different practices hang together. According to Collins, people are not novelty seekers so much as they are emotion seekers. Spaargaren therefore suggests that by considering the symbolic meaning of certain practices, tied up with people, objects, and specific contexts, we could then better understand the type of emotional energy that is experienced. He suggests that linking emotional energy to more 'sustainable' practices could be one way of recruiting more practitioners to a practice.

As recent work relating practice theory to resource consumption has demonstrated, not all of our everyday actions are embedded with meaning and may not qualify as rituals. Turning on a light switch, for example, is a habit that is part of a certain routine, and that moment in itself may not be defined as a ritual – even if more than one person is present and the act is often repeated. It is an action within a practice, but if we relate that action to broader practices, we might uncover emotional energy. In certain cultures, lighting is an important factor in giving off feelings of comfort and coziness (Wilhite et al. 1996). In other contexts, keeping the lights on at night may have to do with feelings of safety (Sahakian 2010). While both Collins and Spaargaren seem to suggest that positive emotional energy is more attractive when recruiting new practitioners, negative emotional energy – such as fear or shame – might be an equally compelling factor. Emotions are related to contextual or societal norms, which are reproduced in everyday life, also through emotional energy – which for Collins is maintained over space and time through interaction rituals. It follows that a subdued or complete lack of emotional energy might lead to breakdown of a practice, or that a change in ritual might also lead to changes in emotional energy.

Spaargaren (2013) proposes a research agenda premised on the consideration of objects and their cultural meanings to understand what kind of practices are associated with such objects, and how these objects flow through various practices and social interactions. Based on the conceptual framework discussed above, my analysis of changing food consumption

practices in the home is focused on understanding what types of emotional energy are associated with certain objects – appliances and CSA produce – and whether such emotions are maintained. I consider how such emotional energy is manifest and how this translates into cultural and symbolic meaning, and assess how meaning diffuses over space and time. I uncover what meanings are tacitly accepted but left unspoken, and what meanings are explicit, in that they are visibly (and verbally) evident.

CASE STUDIES

A Historical Perspective: Household Appliances in Europe

The United States played an important role in deploying appliances to European households in the post-World War II era, not least through Marshall Plan propaganda that positioned appliances ‘as symbols of the benefits that working-class people could enjoy if they abandoned Communism and bought into consumer capitalism’ (Clarke 2012, p. 841). The ‘promise of Americanization’, Furlough (1993) tells us, was about breaking down gender distinctions with ‘new women’ accessing labor-saving goods through messages of ‘efficiency and effortlessness’ and toward a ‘brighter and more managed future’ (pp. 492–493). To some, the United States was ‘a paradise of plenty and the model to follow’ (Pantzar 2003, p. 83) or an ‘irresistible empire’ (de Grazia 2005).⁴ Although most people living in Europe could not afford these products directly after World War II, Pantzar (2003) explains that appliances were already familiar to people through media exposure since the 1920s, promoting images of the American ideal, electrified home. Pantzar found that media played a central role in inventing, shaping, and normalizing the need for household appliances in Finnish society. Accordingly, the Finnish advertising industry, dominated by ties to American agencies and communication models, focused not on promoting products but on promoting new needs.

During the interwar period in France, political and commercial discourse converged around the notion that technological advances would benefit national economic growth and prosperity. As part of a ‘modernist’ movement, manufacturers promoted consumerism along with the ‘liberatory possibilities of a technologically transformed social and political order’ (Frost 1993, p. 111). During this period, selling appliances to the mass market meant positioning them as essential, practical things, rather than luxuries – as part of a normal standard of living that should be available to all classes (Clarke 2012). As such, they were necessary tools, not frivolous toys (Pantzar 2003).

The person who was to help achieve this ‘agenda for growth and consumption beyond the great class divide’ was to be ‘a new woman who was simultaneously a worker, a housekeeper, and a prolific parent’ (Frost 1993, p. 111). As Furlough (1993) states, ‘[T]he identification of femininity with consumer culture was a powerful cultural and economic construct that helped override national differences and served as a transfer point for structures and meanings of American consumer culture’ (p. 510). The consumption of household goods became intertwined with notions of citizenship: women’s and consumer organizations created a ‘specifically feminine variant of citizenship while promoting their own influence by claiming that consuming skills did not come naturally, but through education and training, which they could provide’ (Pulju 2011, p. 12). Consumer organizations hosted meetings to showcase appliances with women sharing in this collective and ritualized moment, and creating and reinforcing the main messages that using such appliances was part of being a good citizen and a good parent. The emotional energy we might imagine at these meetings is that of pride and excitement, at being part of something new and progressive, where women were seen as playing a key role.

Bringing people together in social gatherings – or rituals – was a key marketing and sales strategy for new appliances, and these events took place on a wider scale. Notions of progress and ideas around a liberated housewife were communicated at numerous fairs that sprang up across Europe. Inspired by the more ‘rational’ homes of the United States, Louis Breton launched the first Parisian *Salon des Appareils Ménagers* (Household Appliance Fair) in 1923. Manufacturers were invited to present their appliances and facilitate an ‘encounter between practical and elegant appliances and the mass consumers’ (1923 fair catalogue, cited in Furlough 1993). These popular fairs became a central means for educating and transmitting information on household affairs that broke with traditional forms of knowledge transfer, from mother to daughter. Yet the appliances presented at this fair were beyond the financial reach of most visitors until after World War II, when spectators finally became customers.⁵ At these fairs, technological ‘progress’ was framed as being the new normal (Leymonerie 2006).

Very quickly, the *Salon* moved beyond appliances to showcase interior design, furniture, and architecture – or a more complete vision of this ‘progressive lifestyle’. In 1926, the name changed to *Salon des Arts Ménagers*, or the Art of Living Fair, with appliances more closely tied to notions of beauty, comfort, and style. In the late 1920s, based on the notion that the technological home might seem too audacious for certain clients, the fair began to combine traditional living spaces with the latest modern appliances:

This was a fruitful juxtaposition because a member of the new middle class (say, the wife of an account executive at Citroen) could promenade through one part of the Salon and invent her past in a Louis XV parlor, then walk through the rest and imagine her future in a rationalized kitchen-as-laboratory. (Frost 1993, p. 127)

As social gatherings and consumption rituals, these salons were effective in that 'Prospective consumers could observe demonstrations, tour model houses, listen to lectures, and taste food prepared in new appliances' (Furlough 1993, p. 504). Other forms of advertising, such as mail-order shopping guides, 'product testing' services, or 'pseudo-informative pamphlets' were also among the techniques aimed at 'urging the housewife to buy new things under the guise of training her in her role as skilled consumer' (Cowan 1976, p. 21).

In the 1930s, in a *Salon* journal series titled *Mesdammes, êtes vous Art-Menagères?* (Ladies, are you art-of-living housewives?), women activists and artists were interviewed about how these appliances contributed to 'practical feminism', or making life better through comfort and convenience. At the 1934 *Salon*, Louise Weiss and other feminists joined together to cook a meal with new appliances (Furlough 1993). Over the years, the Parisian fair grew in size, both in terms of exhibitors and visitors. By 1951, the layout and style of the fair had changed. One area was dedicated to smaller appliances that could be tried out and purchased on location, more accessible to the general public; a second area was dedicated to larger, more expensive appliances set in model kitchens, designed to market not only products but a new lifestyle in a manner that may have seemed elusive and aspirational to many visitors.

The art show was another tool deployed to further promote the American consumer lifestyle in Europe. In the early 1950s, and with support from the United States government, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) toured across Europe with design shows that included over 500 household objects (Küntzel 2011). In France in 1955, MoMA showcased *50 Years of American Art*, including artworks but also 'architectural models, furniture, tableware, kitchen appliances and tools – shipped into Paris in the same container' (McDonald 2004, p. 398). Model homes designed by Frank Lloyd Wright sat beside Eames chairs, Tupperware products, and toasters, blurring the division between art, design, and household goods. These shows toured western Europe and were 'a vital means of quelling French fears of American cultural homogenization and of building support for the American way of life' (McDonald 2004, p. 398) while also developing a European market for American goods.

A novel form of direct marketing – the traveling salesman – was also deployed, and became a key factor behind the rapid diffusion of certain

appliances. In the 1930s and 1940s, brands such as Swedish Electrolux, General Electric's (from the United States) Thor brand, or Canadian Hoover (which all opened UK factories in the early 20th century) hired salesmen to travel door to door, and to set up demonstrations in department stores. Salesmen would offer to test out appliances when visiting a home, offering their primarily female clientele a direct experience with a new appliance, but also creating – in Collins' sense – a type of social event. In a 1954 textbook on salesmanship, the author notes, 'Generally speaking, direct selling is most necessary where sales resistance to a product is high. Where the consumer is asked to pay a large sum of money for a speciality, which will bring him no visible monetary return' (cited in Scott 2008, p. 769). The emotional energy shared at such a meeting may have had something to do with the success of this sales strategy, including a sense of pride in belonging to a group, or an emotion that comes from 'the feeling that one's self fits naturally into the flow of interaction' as Collins suggests (2004, p. 120).

General media also played a role in disseminating key messages around new appliances. In a 1953 issue of *Elle* magazine, a journalist claims that the refrigerator is now an essential household good and sign of 'interior comfort', rather than the grand piano, a former symbol of 'exterior wealth' (cited in Leymonerie 2006). The electric kitchen was a part of the house of the future and promised more leisure time to women. In Figure 7.1, the well-heeled French actress Henriette Ragon, better known as Patachou, sits in her 'modern' designer kitchen, reading a magazine. As a journalist writing for *L'Unité paysanne* (*The Farmer Union*) stated, in reacting to these electric kitchens, '[W]hat I realized upon visiting the Salon 1955 for the first time is all that is sinful and depressing in my own home' (translated from French, cited in Leymonerie 2006, p. 49). The main message was that housewives could do better for their families through these appliances while also 'liberating' themselves from chores. Not to be progressive in this way was almost reprehensible. Feelings of shame, according to Collins (2004), break the social rhythm, if only for a micro-moment, but can have more long-lasting effects, such as creating an impression of exclusion from a social situation.

In her critique of the impact of these appliances on family life, Cowan (1976) draws from historical data to paint a more nuanced vision of the 'liberated housewife' and underlines this sense of shame communicated around household appliances. Cowan describes the proliferation of marketing tools, designed to perpetuate the vision of a happy housewife and to change household practices. She found that two main feelings were communicated through women's magazines in the 1920s: feelings of guilt and embarrassment. As she explains:



Source: Courtesy of Scoop.

Figure 7.1 La maison électrique, Paris Match magazine, special issue on the Salon des Arts Ménagers (1955)

In earlier times women were made to feel guilty if they abandoned their children or were too free with their affections. In the years after World War I, American women were made to feel guilty about sending their children to school in scuffed shoes. Between the two kinds of guilt there is a world of difference. (Cowan 1976, p. 22)

As Cowan (1976) tells us, in the context of the United States and after World War I, 'Housework changed: it was no longer a trial and a chore, but something quite different – an emotional “trip.” Laundering was not just laundering, but an expression of love; the house-wife who truly loved her family would protect them from the embarrassment of tattletale grey' (p. 16)

If household appliances liberated any time at all it most often went to more or new chores.⁶ Yet, the notion of the liberated housewife was a meaning that came to be tied *explicitly* to these appliances. This was reinforced by a strong message, communicated in an *implicit* manner through objects such as appliances, that taking care of the family

was – and is – actually more than a just a chore, and that not doing so would be shameful.

A Current Trend: Community-Supported Agriculture in Europe

CSA is part of a growing trend around the world, building on Japanese initiatives called ‘teikei’ in the early 1970s (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine 2004). Researchers claim that 100,000 consumers use this service in France, a similar number of families do the same in North America, and up to 16 million people are part of CSA initiatives in Japan (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine 2004; Porcher 2011). Switzerland has been a pioneer in this respect, with CSA activities inspiring early initiatives in the United States (Henderson and En 2007).

A CSA offer has existed in Geneva since 1978, with *Les Jardins de Cocagne* most likely the first such initiative of its kind in Europe. This CSA was started by politically motivated people who still seek to uphold ‘a living alternative to the dominant economic market’ (Les Jardins de Cocagne 2014). In this model, customers enter into a contractual engagement as members of the association, paying an annual fee that varies depending on declared income. Weekly vegetable baskets are delivered to residential buildings that act as distribution points, with members under obligation to assist with the farming or delivery of produce three to four times per year. One of the main goals of such efforts was to create a direct link between farmers and consumers, providing farmers with decent salaries and consumers with seasonal and organic food. In the 1980s and 1990s, *Les Jardins de Cocagne* was the only such service available in Geneva and had a waiting list of three years for new members. By the early 2000s, several new organizations offered similar services. In 2008, the *Fédération romande pour l’agriculture contractuelle de proximité* (western Switzerland federation for CSAs, or FRACP) included over 25 member groups. In 2012, *Les Jardins de Cocagne* had 200 members, with other member groups in the 80- to 150-member range. In 2011, the *Les Mangeur* service began offering vegetable baskets and organic apples through partnerships with FRACP members.

Switzerland is a unique context in which to understand the rise in popularity of CSA services. While interest in organic farming grew in the 1960s and 1970s, Belz (2004) argues that Swiss organic producers were considered ‘strange and sectarian’ at the time and that ‘the symbolic image and cultural interpretation hindered further diffusion’ (p. 102). The two main food chains, Migros and Coop – which dominate the Swiss retail food market – played an important role in transforming the food-production system. In the 1970s, Migros launched the M-Sano program, setting new

standards across its agrofood chains. Rather than promote exclusively organic farming, Migros opted for what was called ‘integrated production’, a type of farming that would use as few chemicals as possible, setting a new Swiss standard (Belz 2004). Following the 1980s Chernobyl and Sandoz disasters, awareness of environmental issues was heightened; as a result farmers and consumers launched in 1991 an initiative to support organic agriculture, which was in turn endorsed by the Swiss federal government. Migros reintroduced its Bio label in 1995, which had been originally launched with limited success in the 1960s, offering fruit and vegetables. Today, more than 1000 Migros products bear the Bio label, ranging from chocolate and baby foods, to meat and dairy products. Generally more expensive than similar, non-organic products, the organic produce at Migros is based on the following criteria: excluding artificial or chemical inputs; avoiding genetically modified organisms and transport by plane; and supporting free-range animal rearing and organic feed. As the corporate website states, ‘In this way, you can be assured that you are truly eating organic produce, sustainable and close to nature, which allows you to enjoy with peace of mind’ (translated from French).⁷ Building on earlier fears around environmental disasters, the main message behind promoting organic foods remains safety and confidence, presumably toward one’s own health but also toward a broader environment. As integrated production became the new benchmark, organic became accepted as a higher standard in Swiss supermarkets, rather than a novelty, which may explain the rise in CSA offers in recent years, as a way to go above and beyond this standard.

One of the first things that becomes apparent when talking to people about vegetable baskets are the many diverse reasons people first engage with this service and the feelings they have toward it. Many respondents had experienced poor health personally or among family or friends, or began to change their eating habits with the arrival of a baby. Being informed about pesticides and antibiotics also influenced certain people, particularly when it came to the industrialized meat industry. Some people made a link between what would be good for their personal health and what would be good for the earth and general environment, but caring for the planet was generally a secondary reason; important, but perhaps not sufficient in and of itself.

The main emotions tied up with the *Les Mangeurs* offer are that of reassurance and trust – which many state they do not feel toward supermarket products, even if they bear the Bio label. As one young woman put it, ‘*Les Mangeurs*, we completely trust them and we’re right to. There’s no question. It’s local, it’s organic, it’s honest.’ One reason why people trust this service might be because the founders have direct interaction with the

people growing these products. As several people told me, you can ask them questions about how something is grown, how it arrived in the store, or even how it should be stored and prepared, and they will give you exact details. The founders communicate with people at the point of transaction but also over email and through their website. This social interaction seemed important to all those interviewed and can be experienced more generally in the restaurant, a space that carries feelings of warmth, coziness, and conviviality.

Certain people seem frustrated by all the labels on produce in stores, complaining that Migros includes industrially produced goods under its 'local' (*De la region*) designation, using the notion of 'local' in a way that is not respectful of organic principles. Launched in 1999, this local label includes more than 8000 products, or eight times more than the current organic range. People also feel that the Migros Bio label is of a lower standard than what they gain through the *Les Mangeurs* baskets. The lack of trust in these labels was a source of frustration for most of the respondents. People feel uncomfortable talking about their own food consumption patterns that are not aligned with the values associated with eating local and organic food. Drinking coffee, for example, that is neither organic nor locally produced, or not wanting to 'seem difficult' when they eat out in restaurants or at friends' houses. During the winter months, when celery and potatoes can appear in the vegetable baskets for weeks on end, some people claim that they get frustrated with the lack of diversity and will purchase out-of-season produce available year-round in the supermarkets. As one person expressed it, 'the occasional avocado, the early strawberry from southern Europe, or "fair trade" bananas'. There are slight feelings of embarrassment or shame associated with these statements, which usually began with the words, 'I must confess . . .' or 'I'm embarrassed to say . . .'.

Taste and quality are also important to people who sign up for these CSA services. The different types of produce offered is a novelty for some members who are not familiar with how to prepare seasonal vegetables such as the Jerusalem artichoke or parsnips. The CSA vegetables also arrive in non-standard shapes and sizes, quite different from the perfectly shaped and colored vegetables that are most present in supermarkets. Yet, most respondents were familiar with these vegetables from their past. They either grew up with their own vegetable garden at their parents' or grandparents' home or remember buying fresh produce from local markets and, in rarer cases, in special arrangements with local farms. These emotions are revived as people encounter these same vegetables again, and tap into memories of their childhood – filled with washing garden salads and dirt-covered potatoes. The dominant trend of buying vegetables year-round in

supermarkets is a fairly recent phenomenon, one that has taken hold only over the past one or two generations in Switzerland.

Wasting food evokes negative feelings in people. While larger families generally manage to eat all the vegetables delivered in their CSA baskets, others did tell me that some of the produce was wasted, particularly couples or individuals who may not be eating their meals at home as regularly as families with children. So as not to waste food, some people share vegetables with friends and neighbors, or prepare meals and share them with people in their immediate vicinity.

More positive emotions are evoked through a sense of solidarity with other consumers in the CSA and with the growers. The notion of supporting local agriculture was important to many respondents, or that buying into these vegetable baskets is a way of 'doing your part' to support local farmers. While *Les Mangeurs* plays an important role as a space for social interaction in the neighborhood – what one person described as an island where people share similar values – not all of the CSA services offer this type of meeting space. Other vegetable baskets are distributed at specific points in the neighborhood, where people set up self-service stands and where few social interactions occur. Baskets are picked up, names are crossed off lists, and members do not necessarily meet, other than at general assemblies, or ever have direct contact with the farmers. In some instances, the CSA contract requires some participation in terms of working the land. There is a surprising amount of solidarity in these groups – a sense of belonging to a community and being supportive of the wider collectivity – despite limited in-person interactions among group members. The *idea* of belonging seems as important as actual, physical interactions with other community members.

An interesting source of positive emotions is the element of surprise associated with not knowing what products will come in each week's delivery. Most people appreciate the fact that vegetables arrive according to the season and not based on choices they have made in a supermarket, and that these vegetables will dictate what they will be eating in a given week. People talk about this constraint as something liberating. As one woman put it, 'I like that it's somebody else deciding for me what I should eat. Rather than make decisions about what we should eat this time, we just get it, and we explore, and it's fun.' One would assume that not having a choice is a constraint, but rather people actually experience this constraint as a form of liberation from choice, what psychologist Barry Schwartz (2003) famously termed 'the paradox of choice'. Excessive and complicated choices do not free people up but rather bog them down with an additional responsibility as they seek to balance values related to personal health, environmental concerns, and solidarity with certain groups, among others

– a responsibility they would much rather pass on to the people managing *Les Mangeurs*.

It is important to note here a distinction between explicit and implicit meanings: people will not directly say ‘I like to have my choices taken away’ as ‘freedom of choice’ has been constructed in our value system as a normative good. It was only through in-depth discussions that I was able to understand how people feel about having their choices restricted, and generally this was not a negative feeling, so long as the offer is aligned with their values. For example, having choice restricted to solely industrial produce would not be acceptable for this group of people. Trust in the CSA service is also central to positive emotions associated with ceding control of food selection.

The primary means through which people hear about CSAs is word of mouth. The baskets seem to attract people who are already convinced about the value of such a service and who grew up eating these types of vegetables. When speaking to people who do not adhere to CSA services, the perceptions regarding vegetable baskets seemed to be quite consistent: the vegetables are too expensive compared with what can be found in supermarkets, even under the organic label;⁸ being part of this service means you have to work the fields, ‘like living in a kibbutz’ as someone put it; and that it would be inconvenient to receive these vegetables on a weekly or bi-monthly basis. There are few opportunities to experience a lifestyle associated with CSA baskets, in the same way that appliances were tied up with the ‘art of living’ salons popular across Europe at an earlier point in time. While fairs focusing on Slow Food, organic, or local food production are gaining in popularity, they do not seem to attract the general public in the way that the Salons once did. Opportunities for ‘interaction rituals’ that involve locally produced and organic agriculture derived from CSAs are thus much more limited.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to understand whether a cultural reading of consumption, focused on symbolic meaning and related emotions (Collins 2004; Spaargaren 2013), could bring a new dimension to a social practices approach to sustainable consumption. To do so, I used two food-related European case studies – a historic account of household appliances in the post-World War II period and empirical data from an existing CSA food basket service.

The first conclusion is that the messages surrounding household appliances centered on situating appliances as part of a new and presumably

improved lifestyle, as a form of liberation from chores, and as a form of patriotic capitalism associated with productivity and progress. Even if the economic benefits of acquiring appliances were not evident to most consumers, the message was clear: in the post-war period in North America and western Europe, household electric appliances were no longer considered frivolous accessories, but rather had become necessities. This meaning was intended, or indeed crafted, by various interest groups that converged around the theme, from government agencies, to consumer organizations and women's groups, to commercial interests and their marketing and sales agencies, and, not least, the general media. Rather than rely solely on advertisements, pamphlets, and other one-way forms of communication, public and private interest groups organized events to promote household appliances through training sessions by consumer groups, prominent city fairs, and traveling salesmen. All of these strategies translated into social gatherings where cultural meanings were explicitly and consistently communicated, during interactions where emotional energy was transmitted, toward appliances and across different consumption spaces, from the home, to the fair, to the store.

The variety of meanings and emotions associated with CSA products is neither as clear nor as widely discussed as in the case of appliances. The CSA offers often rely on word of mouth and although organic agriculture is subsidized in much of Europe, there is no overt effort by commercial and public interests to replace industrialized agriculture with organic methods. The symbolic meaning of acquiring appliances as part of a new, modern, and liberated lifestyle were much more explicit than the interpretations that might be intended around promoting local and organic foods at different food fairs. Not all CSA offers include an actual social space of exchange as part of their service which might suggest that feeling virtually connected could be as significant as coming together in social happenings. The range of emotional energy that people experience when they engage with a CSA includes nostalgia for their own past, trust toward CSA providers, and solidarity toward local farmers and other CSA members. People also share a certain peace of mind and reassurance toward personal and family health, as well as coherence with their values, as a type of emotional energy.

Of interest in both cases are the implicit meanings, which are not overtly communicated but operate under the surface of public discourse, and translate into strong emotional energy. In relation to household appliances, women may have been made to feel ashamed of not having these 'modern' accessories, guilty for not being better mothers or housewives, or unpatriotic for not supporting this industry. Here, the meanings tied up with appliances came to change the meaning of housework altogether, from a chore to something more important: 'an emotional trip . . . an expression of

love', as Cowan (1976, p. 16) nicely puts it. A new set of values was created out of the practice of preparing food with new appliances, and this set of values was then carried through other practices that had to do with caring for family and home. The cultural meaning associated with objects – in this case household appliances – came to change the meaning of the practice and related practices altogether. The implicit, under-the-surface meanings tied up with CSA services – which are not expressly communicated around vegetable baskets – seem more positive and center on people experiencing feelings of pleasant surprise when they receive their baskets, experiencing them not as a constraint but a form of liberation that stimulates creativity. The dominant discourse, at least in the context of Europe and North America, is that choice is a consumer right, an ultimate freedom. But in practice, people seem to be happier when their choices are constrained, as long as the offer is aligned with their core values and guiding principles. Finally, guilt is also a prominent emotion around CSA services: people feel culpable when their consumption patterns are not aligned with these same values; when they drink imported coffee, eat out-of-season produce, or waste food.

One question remains: whether such emotions are carried through over space and time. In the case of appliances, most likely feelings of women's liberation or patriotic duty are no longer prominently associated with the use of household appliances, at least in the European context. Certain equipment has become the norm in most households, such as the refrigerator and oven. New appliances are no doubt coveted, such as the latest fruit blender or coffee machine, but people may not necessarily feel guilty about not acquiring them. In the case of CSAs, it is harder to say how feelings associated with locally produced, organic vegetables might evolve over time. CSAs are becoming more common but the meanings and emotions associated with these programs may change in different cultural contexts.⁹ The case studies presented in this chapter suggest that more interaction rituals in CSAs are necessary to foster a situation where, to borrow from Lave and Wenger ([1991] 2009), people come together as practitioners in a community of practice – learning about the material dimension of consumption, but also sharing stories and emotional energy.

Feelings of trust, solidarity, and duty could be motivating emotions toward more sustainable consumption, and are emotions that would merit further study. Feelings of guilt and shame, communicated in a non-explicit fashion, seem to be quite effective in the recruitment of new practitioners to a practice – as was the case with household appliances. The same feelings, this time *explicitly* communicated, however, make existing CSA practitioners doubt their own discourse and actions. If moralistic messages, delivered directly through certain environmental and social campaigns,

for example, may be creating undue stress for those who already adhere to sustainability values in their daily lives, is it effective to continue with these types of communication? By contrast, as we saw in the example of household appliances, *implicit* messages around guilt – that are not overtly stated but rather implied – do seem to be effective. People appear to be attracted by clear messages that convey meanings associated with strong positive emotions, such as leading the ‘good life’, laced with implicit moralistic messages, such as being a ‘bad mother and wife’. This is an approach that marketing agencies have understood quite well, starting in the post-World War II era and continuing through today. This leads me to question whether we, as researchers, would be comfortable delivering moralistic messages around what is right or wrong when it comes to consumption through subliminal means.

What remains to be explored is whether people have to meet and exchange in a social context to share emotional energy, or if meanings can be shared between imagined communities. Benedict Anderson ([1983] 2006) argues that people can feel part of the same geographic space – the ‘nation state’ in his work – while never actually meeting each other personally. For Anderson, this sense of belonging, what we might call emotional energy and sense of attachment to a community, comes about through language, communication, and learning. For Collins, it is precisely this sense of group solidarity that showcases the positive emotional energy associated with interaction rituals (Kemper 2011). How people come to feel emotionally engaged in more sustainable communities of practice, toward greater solidarity within a group and beyond, would be an interesting avenue for further research. Projecting a ‘good life’ that is more sustainable would be an important step in this direction. Rather than reinvent the wheel, turning toward existing communities of practice, including CSAs, to understand the sense of belonging, imaginaries, and emotions tied up with ‘sustainable living’ seems like a good place to start.

NOTES

1. For the many millions of people around the world that live without viable access to these resources, water and energy are replete with social meaning. This argument pertains to the context of the global North, where access to resources has become both expected and normal, for the vast majority of people.
2. Questions of whether household appliances are sustainable or CSA services are unsustainable merit further discussion but these issues are not explored here. My main interest is in understanding how practices change over time and how practitioners might be recruited toward more ‘sustainable’ consumption practices. I make a general assumption that household appliances, whatever their social and environmental impact, are part of the dominant economic model – where more consumption is generally considered a

good thing and CSA services are positioned as an alternative to the customary market economy.

3. The work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens is discussed elsewhere in this book. Regarding Charles Taylor and Michel Foucault, Reckwitz appreciated their 'praxeological' approach to understanding social life. Taylor sought to dispel the notion of a 'disengaged subject', reduced to atomism and mentalism, rooted in concepts from early modernity. He proposed the notion of the 'self-interpreting animal', or a self that is constituted through attempts at 'articulation' that are based on implicit understandings and shifting practices (see Taylor 1985). Foucault investigated different theoretical approaches in his career, including structuralism and arriving at a discussion around the relations among body, agency, knowledge, and ethics in his later work (Foucault 1984), particularly in relation to domains, networks, and power relations.
4. For others, anti-American sentiment grew strongly during the early Cold War years. Duhamel (1931) presaged this critique of the American way of life.
5. Prior to the mid-1950s, there were instances in which Parisian working-class groups would band together to share the costs and benefits of new appliances, in a form of collective solidarity, for electric water heaters and clothes-washing machines, for example (Leymonerie 2006).
6. In 1929, an American study found that women reported having less leisure time than might be expected with the arrival of new appliances in the home. Hewes (1930) noted that 'it must be admitted that an examination of the actual uses made of time saved is disappointing as compared to the promises of things possible made by the salesmen of electric appliances' (Hewes 1930, p. 241).
7. See Migros website (2014) Les principes de Bio (Organic principles), retrieved 30 March 2014, from <http://www.migros.ch/fr/supermarche/bio/principes.html>.
8. A television program oriented around the promotion of consumer interests in Switzerland (*A bon Entendeur*) recently evaluated several CSA offers and found them to be providing produce that was less expensive than comparable fruits and vegetables in conventional stores.
9. See Freidberg and Goldstein (2011) for an account of how a CSA service failed in Kenya. According to the authors, the CSA was not necessary in this context, as community markets already existed and promoted locally grown produce as well as solidarity between urban communities and rural areas.

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