

A practice theoretical perspective on everyday dealings with environmental challenges of food consumption.

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A practice theoretical perspective on everyday dealings with environmental challenges of food consumption

Une perspective théorique des pratiques alimentaires quotidiennes liées à la durabilité de la consommation

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Expectations concerning the contribution of ordinary consumers to solving a broad array of societal problems have risen. This is particularly prevalent in issues such as environmental sustainability and food consumption, where ordinary food routines are being challenged through mediatised discourses on the environmental responsibilities of food consumers. In this article, in order to discuss the potential of ordinary food consumers in contributing to sustainability, we start from a theoretical stance and discuss how two different understandings of food consumption lead to different possibilities of "environmentalising" food consumption. Discussion is based on three Danish empirical qualitative research projects about food practices. We argue that it is difficult to judge which position offers more openings for sustainability: to consider environmentalised food consumption as part of broader food practices, or rather as a part of practices themselves? This is related to the interdependency of social actors and the dynamics of food.

Les attentes portant sur la contribution des consommateurs ordinaires pour résoudre un vaste éventail de problèmes de société ne cessent de croître. Cela se constate particulièrement en matière de développement durable et de consommation alimentaire, car les habitudes ordinaires se trouvent bousculées par les discours médiatisés concernant les responsabilités des mangeurs en matière d'environnement. Dans cet article, nous partons d'une position théorique et discutons la manière dont deux modes de consommation alimentaire mènent à différentes manières d'« environnementaliser » la consommation alimentaire. La discussion se fonde sur trois recherches empiriques qualitatives danoises. Nous avançons qu'il est difficile de juger quelle posture permet davantage de durabilité: doit-on considérer la notion de consommation alimentaire « respectueuse de l'environnement » comme un élément de pratiques plus larges, ou plutôt comme une partie indissociable de ces pratiques ? On peut relier cela à l'interdépendance des acteurs sociaux et aux dynamiques des pratiques alimentaires.

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Index terms

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[Introduction](#)

Over the past 20 years, expectations to the potentials in changing patterns of consumption by the means of ordinary consumers themselves have risen significantly. In public debates, communication campaigns and public policies, consumers are being ascribed with agency to help solving a broad array of societal problems (Halkier and Holm, 2008), for example the environmental problems. In the light of the renewed discussions about environmental problems and e.g. global climate changes, the interest in the contributions of ordinary consumers to problems as well as solutions has resurfaced. Exploring the possibilities and dilemmas of how ordinary consumers deal with environmental challenges in relation to the food area is complicated. Food is both materially and symbolically very central for consumers in everyday life (Holm, 2003; Warde, 1997), and at the same time food is intertwined in large scale institutionalised dynamics, such as the globalised markets and public regulatory systems (Kjærnes et al, 2007). Whether and how consumers can contribute to making food consumption more sustainable is a complicated question, because it involves so many different social dynamics and relationships crossing everyday life, market relations, public

regulations and discourses in the mass-media (Boström and Klintman, 2008; Shove, 2003; Spaargaren, 2000). One of the conditions for trying to answer parts of this question is to conceptualise consumption as a complex phenomenon of both dynamic agency as well as the social conditionings of such agency (Gronow and Warde, 2001).

2Simplifying slightly, the sociological debates in relation to changing consumption patterns have had a tendency to fall in two opposite camps. One main line of argumentation focuses on the empowering consequences for everyday life and for solving societal problems in the shape of consumer citizenship. This is what you might call the political consumer argument (Boström et al, 2005; Michelletti, 2003; Soper and Trentman, 2008). Here the understanding of consumption processes has a tendency to focus on the dynamic and reflected processes, and to focus on the active agency of consumers. The other main line of argumentation tends to focus on the problematic consequences for everyday life and for solving societal problems in the shape of increased disciplining or insecurity of orientation. This is what you might call the governmentality argument (Dean, 1999; Halkier, 2004; Luke, 1999) or the communication culture argument (Bonner, 2005; Carter, 2005; Thompson, 1995). Here, the understandings of consumption focus primarily on the more or less structured conditionings of consumption, and there is a tendency to see consumer agency as more ambivalent.

3This article takes a theoretical starting-point which allows for combination of agency and conditionings of agency in consumption. The purpose of this article is to show how two equally complex understandings of food consumption frame differently the discussion of making food consumption more environmentally friendly, thus opening for different possibilities for sustainability of consumption. One understanding sees consumption as an ever present aspect of food practices. The other understanding sees variants of environmentalised food consumption as distinct practices themselves.

4First, I introduce the theoretical practice perspective of the article. Second, I go on to a methodological section, because the article draws upon several empirical studies. Third, I illustrate the understanding of consumption as part of food practices with empirical examples discussed in relation to sustainability. Fourth, I illustrate the understanding of environmentalised food consumption as practices in themselves with empirical examples discussed in relation to sustainability. Finally, I conclude by commenting on the agency versus governmentality discussion.

[A practice theoretical starting-point](#)

5The analytical perspective within cultural theory taken in the article is a practice theoretical one. Practice theory is not a coherent theory, rather a particular

reading of an assembly of theoretical elements in e.g. early Pierre Bourdieu (1990), early Anthony Giddens (1984), late Michel Foucault (1978), Erving Garfinkel (1967), Judith Butler (1990) and Bruno Latour (1993). A practice theoretical reading foregrounds the common assumptions among these theoreticians about the performativity of social practices. Thus, analysis focuses on social action, and how social action is carried out and carried through. Recent conceptual systematisation (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001; 2002) turns the elements into a distinct analytical approach to social life.

6 Practice theory can be distinguished from several other kinds of cultural theories (Reckwitz, 2002: 247-49), where two of them are relevant for the subject of this article. Practice theory is firstly different from what is labelled *cultural mentalism*, where the social is placed in mental repertoires of actors' consciousness and in mental activities such as common understandings and assumptions. Phenomenology can be seen as an example of cultural mentalism in the sense that phenomenological studies primarily are interested in analysing how social life is expressed through intentional interpretations of meaning in actors' experiences (e.g. de Certeau, 1984; Luckmann, 1989; Schütz, 1975). Secondly, practice theory is different from *cultural textualism* which places the social outside of actors in larger chains of signs, symbols, language and discourses. Various types of social constructivist approaches can be seen as examples of cultural textualism in the sense that they primarily pay attention to how sociality is expressed discursively (e.g. Hall, 1997; Laclau, 1996; Luhmann, 1995).

7 Instead, practice theory places the social in the performance of practices. The concept of practice is defined as: "A practice...is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of other etc. – forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements." (Reckwitz, 2002:249-50).

8 Such a definition allows for a multi-relational understanding of practices as performed and produced activities in social life. Practices, such as shopping, cooking, eating transporting, working and parenting, are in this and other central definitions in practice theory seen as coordinated activities. Activities are doings and sayings that are coordinated by webs of a number of equally important and interconnected dynamics (Schatzki, 2002: 77).

9 Practice theory has entered the discussions of the sociology of consumption and food as part of the reactions from late 1990's against the alleged dominance of a post-modern understanding of consumption with focus on the individual consumer as free and creative actors and the symbolic aspects of their activities.

These reactions consisted in underlining the necessity of treating consumption as everyday life phenomena by highlighting the practical, routinised, conventional and collective character of consumption (e.g. Gronow and Warde, 2001; Shove, 2003; Warde, 2005).

10 Alan Warde suggests an analytical translation of the concepts of practice from Reckwitz and Schatzki into the empirical study of consumption. Here he clarifies the concept of practice as constituting a nexus of practical activity and its representations (doings and sayings) which become organised by understandings, procedures and engagements (Warde, 2005:134). Hereby a simplification of the elements of the configuration is achieved which makes the concept of practice slightly more manageable in relation to empirical research.

11 In this article, practice theory is used as a distinct analytical approach for empirical analysis to which other field-relevant theoretical concepts and analytical knowledge about the field can be related. To see handlings of environmental challenges to food consumption in a perspective of multi- relationally organised practices allow for openness towards diversities in such handlings.

Consumption as practices – or consumption as part of practices?

12 When discussing everyday food consumption in relation to environmental challenges, and whether and how ordinary consumers can participate in environmental solutions, an apparently small theoretical detail may become important. The theoretical detail question is how to conceptualise consumption within a practice theoretical perspective? Warde suggests that consumption should *not* be seen as a practice in itself, but rather as an aspect of almost every type of practice (Warde, 2005:137), because most consumption takes place without being noticed as consumption. In this sense, it is practices that generate consumption activities, and not the other way around.

13 An advantage in seeing environmentally friendly consumption *as part of* food practices could be that this understanding opens up a multiplicity of ways into which consumption could be environmentalised, which makes environmentally friendly consumption more flexible and adaptable for everyday agency. For example consumers can hook onto the transportation element of food practices, or the packaging element of food practices, or the pesticide element of food practices etc. The disadvantage of seeing environmentally friendly food consumption as part of food practices could be that the contribution of everyday agency to sustainability runs the risk of becoming more piecemeal and scattered, hence more difficult to measure.

14 On the other hand, it makes analytical sense to think of some types of food consumption as practices in themselves exactly because they - as any other practice - are performed and recognised as a specific practice by other everyday practitioners (Warde, 2005:133-35). When consumption of food becomes challenged on environmental grounds, it is usually happening interdependently through medialised discourses in society and interpersonal communications and negotiations in everyday life situations and settings. The medialised discourses are capable of 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000; Klintman, 2006) particular food consumption patterns as practices. In Denmark for example, 'organic consumption' is a society-wide circulating association to particular socially recognisable bundles of activities and representations (doings and sayings) (Halkier and Holm, 2008). Likewise, particular practical versions of organic consumption can for some everyday food practitioners gain a high level of normative engagement (Halkier, 1999:31-32) and become a project - a distinct bundle of normative doings and sayings - and be recognised as such by other everyday practitioners.

15 An advantage in seeing environmentally friendly food consumption *as* practices could be, that this understanding can clarify this type of consumption as a whole package that covers many aspects of one activity at the same time - the obvious example is to consume organic food. The disadvantage could be the tendency to turn food practices into environmentalised projects, which can then become overwhelming for everyday practitioners and ends up in less contribution to solving environmental problems.

16 The advantages and disadvantages of the two different understandings of food consumption are illustrated empirically and discussed in more detail in following sections of the article. But before that, there is a short outline of the empirical projects upon which these sections build upon.

Empirical data-materials and methods

17 The first empirical project is "Environmental consideration among young food consumers", (Halkier, 1999). The research is a qualitative in-depth study of how young Danes experience and negotiate environmental considerations in consumption. The sample of nine young people aged 18 - 21 displays a variation according to gender, social background, education level and geography. The qualitative data in the study was produced by a combination of individual interviewing and re-interviewing (Spradley, 1979), and focus groups (Morgan, 1997). Data was originally analysed through coding, categorising and domain analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) as well as through conversation analysis (Antaki, 1994) and discourse psychology (Potter, 1996).

- 1 The other part of the data-material in the project consisted in a text-analysis of different types (...)

18The second project is “The risks of consumption. Environmental norms and consumer practices”, (Halkier, 2001b). The research is a qualitative in-depth study of how parents with young children handle environmentally (and other) risks in food in everyday life. The sample consisted of 31 parents with children below the age of 5 who displayed a variance according to gender, social background, educational level and geography. The data-material relevant for this article consisted in one part with 6 focus groups (Morgan, 1997) with parents who in each of the focus groups were in social network with each other. The focus groups were originally analysed through coding, categorising, domain analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), conversation analysis (Antaki, 1994) and discourse psychology (Potter, 1996) [1](#) (1).

19The third project is “Cooking in Medialised Society”, (Halkier, 2007). The research is a qualitative in-depth study of how cooking is practiced among Danish female readers of the magazine “Isabellas. Enthusiastic about Everyday”. The cooking practices are in particular seen in relation to the normative representations of cooking from scratch in the magazine. The sample of eight women displays a variation according to age, education level, family status and geography. The qualitative data in the study was produced by a combination of individual interviewing and re-interviewing (Spradley, 1979; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003), auto-photography (Hurdley, 2007), and network focus groups (Puchta and Potter, 2005). The data-analysis was carried out on the basis of coding, categorising and domain analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) and positioning analysis (Harré and Langenhove, 1999). The focus group data will not be drawn upon in this article.

20Data from the two first projects was for this article re-analysed in a practice theoretical perspective, using the conceptual translation of practice theory into sociology of consumption made by Warde: What kind of shopping, cooking and eating *activities* are carried out (doings and sayings), and how are these activities coordinated by *understandings* of shopping, cooking and eating, *procedures* in shopping, cooking and eating, and *engagements* in shopping, cooking and eating. Data from the third project was already produced through a practice theoretical perspective.

21The two following empirical sections illustrate the understandings of consumption first as an aspect of food practices, secondly as environmentalised food consumption practices in themselves. The typology of food practices in the first empirical section and the typology of environmental performances in the second empirical section are not individually methodologically based. This means that each type in the typologies does not just reflect the doings and sayings of one individual participant in the research projects. Rather, each type of food practice or environmental performance represents several participants. At the same time, the experiences of each participant are in accordance with several different types of food practices or environmental performances, because everyday life is not coherent.

Food performances – consumption as part of practices

22The empirical illustrations in this section draw upon data-material from the project on young consumers and the environment, as well as from the project on women's cooking in medialised society.

Food practices as improvisation over pleasure

23This type of food practices is coordinated by various understandings, procedures and engagements, but pleasure is a dominating aspect of both understandings of food, procedures for handling food and engagements in food. Cooking is mostly done on the basis of what the practitioner feels like eating on the very day and what food stuff is found in cupboards, fridge and freezer, including left-overs. Shopping is done without a plan for specific meals but in order to have storage of food stuff with which to improvise cooking and eating creatively (Moiso et al, 2004: 374-75). One of the young consumers describes it in this manner: *“Yesterday, we had our old favourite meal, hotch-potch...it's an easy meal. Cause you mix everything, and it has no character of it's own, because you stuff it with spices, so you cannot tell the difference between a celery and a carrot, But you know...it was a good meal.”* (Helga, female young, unemployed). The same goes for use of cookbooks and recipes – if the ingredients are not there, the practitioner improvises and replace with something from the cupboard or fridge, or asks someone from the social network what would be a proper replacement. Eating is understood as an important, pleasurable and exciting activity, best done in company with others. Cooking is understood as a relaxing activity that makes family and friends happy, and food and cooking is discussed intensely around the dinner table. Here, one of the women from the cooking project expresses the pleasure of food practices: *“You know, if I have baked a bread or something, that's lovely tangible compared to what I do in my job...and then some meal came out of it, and often the children go yum-yum, and you can see they shove it in, and that is some kind of satisfaction.”* (Ellen, 30's, communication planner)

Food practices as necessity

24This type of food practices is mainly coordinated by necessities. The main understanding is that it is necessary for the person or the family to get something to eat, and thus it is necessary that somebody provides these meals. Cooking practices have to be manageable and the activities are manoeuvred in relation with the crossings of all other practices of a busy everyday life. One of the female cooking practitioners expresses this in the following: *“I have worked many night-shifts. Then it's not the great culinary expeditions I embark upon, it just isn't....And*

the food gets marked by that immediately, it does. Then it's pasta and minced meat and...what I have the energy to." (Tilde, 30's, nursing aide). Only major shopping is planned, and often cooking is done on the basis of experimenting with what is already in fridge, freezer and cupboards. Food and eating is mainly understood as fuel (Lupton, 1996:143-44) that keeps you going in order to do all the other things in your life, and how this eating takes place is less important. One of the young consumers puts it this way: *"When I come home I make something...I do a lot of potatoes and gravy, and some kind of meat. But I eat rice, noodles and spaghetti as well, that depends. On what I feel for and how tired I am, whether I can take the trouble to. It depends very much on that."* (Nis, male young, unskilled worker). Cooking is primarily understood as a necessary everyday chore in line with other everyday routine chores.

Food practices as health

25 This kind of food practices revolves around performing healthy in a broad sense of the term. Cooking is being done preferably in such ways that either the practitioner feels she is doing something good. Either doing good is performed by cooking and eating food that is considered good for her/himself or family or friends: *"I think I have found out that when I make things myself...it gives me a greater pleasure to eat it, and I gain a better, I don't know if you can call it a better consciousness, but it makes me feel better, I think I am doing something good for myself by not jumping over the lowest part of the fence..."* (Thea, 30's, office clerk). Or doing good is performed by using procedures and products that are constructed as more healthy:

"Everything must be rinsed very thoroughly before I eat it, cause I don't know what they have sprayed it with. From oranges to carrots to apples, everything must be rinsed, because you can't count on anything. You don't know what's genetically manipulated and what's not. I take care to rinse what I buy and try as far as possible to buy organic, so I can count on the animals to have had a good time or the vegetables to have grown in earth that's not too pervaded." (Sonja, female young, post-person).

26 Shopping is done every other day, but upholding storage from which to compose meals, and recipes are not necessarily used, except for inspiration for new and different cooking, or for advice on healthy diets. Food and eating is understood as contributing to the protection and well-being of the body (Holm and Kildevang, 1996:8). Cooking is understood as an activity that brings wellbeing about both in terms of the procedures as well as in terms of the results.

Planned food practices

27 In this type of food practices, the significance of planning going into almost all

aspects of the coordination of the food practices. Shopping for food stuff is done after planned lists, and cooking is done from the ground on the basis of running plans for evening meals, often drawing upon recipes, cookbooks and the freezer for help (Short, 2006:56-64). Here is an example from one of the young consumers' food practices: *"You know, for example there was 1 kilo of minced beef for 40 kr., then I ran out and bought a couple of kilos, and then I put it in the freezer in small portions. Then I can easily defrost them and use them when necessary."* (Anders, male young, university student). The planning aspect is not just used to organise the practical what and how to cook and eat on a daily basis. The planning aspect is also used to follow the seasons for food stuff and to regulate the food intake – to eat more of what is considered good food and less of what is considered bad food. One of the women in the cooking project explains this:

"It's something about keeping that freezer...going, I suppose and empty it out or eat from it...and a bit from this we make our meal plans, and then off course from what we feels like...or what we are doing...[...]...and then off course now that I'm pregnant, we have had a lot of focus on this with a vegetarian day and a fish day and ...trying to eat a bit more healthy than we probably otherwise would do." (Birte, 30's, maternity leave).

28Both eating and cooking is understood as activities that need to be organised and scheduled in order to fulfil their important social, pleasurable and regulatory purposes.

[Openings for environmentally friendly elements?](#)

29Looking at the examples where food consumption is seen as a part of food practices, three out of the four types of food practices could easily include different elements of environmentally friendly consumption without any of the elements of the organisation of the food practices changed radically. In 'food practices as improvisation over pleasure', there is room for practitioners to place especially the engagement in food practices in for example organic food stuff and local food stuff, due to the focus on pleasure that can go well together with the alleged sensate and aesthetic qualities of such types of food stuff (Day and Truninger, 2007). In 'food practice as health', again it is particularly the engagement element of organising food practices, focusing on using food as health-booster that can match environmentally friendly food consumption such as organic food stuff and other types of food stuff with less additives or residues. In Denmark, the most often given reason for buying organic food stuff is, that these are considered healthier to eat than conventional goods (Halkier og Holm, 2004:19). In 'planned food practices', it is the procedures of the cooking and eating practice that lends an opening for integrating environmentally friendly food consumption. When it is important to cook meals from the ground and plan carefully what to keep in the house in order to cook such meals, a focus comes on

raw materials and with that a drive towards wanting to know the raw materials and being in control of them, that could easily be coupled with home grown food stuff, local food stuff, organic food stuff and less industrialised food stuff.

30 However, the type 'food practices as necessity' does not necessarily dovetail with environmentally friendly food consumption. Unless these kinds of consumption activities are already a part of the practices, it will be difficult to include them, because neither understandings, nor procedures nor engagements of such food practices invite this.

Environmental performances – consumption as practices

31 In this section, data-material from the project on young consumers and the environment as well as the parent and food risk project are drawn upon. The section focuses on a particular aspect of environmentalised food consumption, namely different types of relations between routines and reflections among food practitioners with regards to the environmental challenges. Seen in a practice theoretical perspective, these relations between routinisation and reflexivity can be understood as bodily/mental procedures in the organisation of environmentalised food consumption practices. Routinisation occurs when understandings and engagements in practices are based on tacit knowledge through practical consciousness and procedures in practices are taken for granted. Reflexivity occurs when understandings, procedures and engagements in practices are explicit and reflected upon through discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984:5-14). The main argument of this section is that environmental performances are neither only reflected nor only routines, rather the two bodily/mental procedures are intertwined with each other.

Routinisation of reflexivity

32 In this type of environmental performances, reflections upon consequences of food consumption and active environmentally friendly choices have become routinely appropriated and incorporated into the practical food consumption activities. This particular bodily/mental procedure is part of the organisation of the food consumption practices to such a degree, that it is taken for granted as an integral part of the performance. A positive normative engagement in doing good for the environment has become routinised. Here one of the young consumers talk about his food shopping, where he routinely buys organic goods and Danish vegetables in the season: *"I just think...then it's just become such a natural part of my day...think about it, really it's just...ok, you think about it, but it's just become natural, it doesn't occur to me to buy the other goods"* (Morten, male young, employed in supermarket). Thus, environmentally friendly food consumption

becomes a practical social accomplishment.

33 One of the parents of young children enacts the same type of routinely appropriated and incorporated environmental reflections. Here she tells a parallel little narrative, describing the practical details of 'doing' environmentalised food consumption:

"I don't know...you know I think I have a tendency to have ideological tastebuds...someone said to me once...[laughter]...I simply believe that organic tomatoes taste better than the traditional ones...so if they have something organic for sale...in the shop today...you know, if they for example have organic cauliflower, then I can suddenly feel like eating cauliflower-soup. I don't feel like it all winter, because...I don't know, I am very selective because...you know I pass by completely the desk with vegetables because never mind about the traditional stuff, it's about, whoops, here is one organic thing, right...okay now it was cucumbers, right, so we are having tzattiki this week." (Cecilie, female parent, employed in clothes shop).

34 The female parent describes how assumed environmentally friendly understandings and engagements are build into the procedures of the ways she moves her body through the social space of the shops.

Ambivalence between routinisation and reflexivity

35 This kind of environmental performance entails a potential conflict in the food consumption practices, because the bodily/mental procedures of shopping, cooking and eating are experienced as becoming disturbed by environmental challenges. Ambivalence does not necessarily have to be understood as tension, there are several other ways for food consumers to enact ambivalence (Boström and Klintman, this issue; Halkier, 2001a), but here it is the enactment of tension that is focused upon.

36 Practically, the tensions and disturbances appear in various dilemmas in the organisation of the daily food consumption activities. Here, one of the parents explains about the relation between environmental knowledge and his food consumption practices:

"I think about that one, actually it irritates me...baked without straw-shortener, right...you know, straw-shortened wheat...because it makes me think that the label is put there because some while ago there was a debate about horses being less fertile or their sperm-quality being much lower due to straw-shortener, right. And this label is meant to make me think that straw-shortener is something terrible, which I think it probably IS...but I find it tiresome that they have to manipulate with such a bloody sign there, it irritates me. And this is..."

if I go shopping, what I buy is directed by what irritates me.”
(Johannes, male parent, pedagogue).

37The male parent explains how he in some ways feel almost forced into reflecting upon his food consumption because as an ordinary media user he cannot help but come into contact with the discourses in mass-media on environmental risks (Thompson, 1995) through direct media use and through the ways in which the food provision system uses and frames such discourses through labelling.

38One of the young consumers comes with a more all-encompassing statement about dilemmas in environmental performance in food consumption: “...*but certainly, I think it's something you ought to think about, but it demands that you change your habits totally, and that demands some time. And I don't have time now, and I don't think very many young people have that.*” (Lena, female young, home help). The young consumer does not pinpoint particular examples of practical situations of ambivalence as the male parent does. Rather, she understands the normative environmental challenges of her food consumption as being one united package of practices that should be appropriated, and therefore does not fit into her present lifestyle. She also normalises this ambivalence between reflexivity and routinisation by expressing it on behalf of ‘many young people’. Lena here understands environmentally friendly consumption as a particular interconnected bundle of doings and sayings that amount to a whole project package she does not feel able to incorporate. Hence, this is the disadvantage of the understanding of environmentalised food consumption as a practice in itself.

Routinisation as relief from reflexivity

39In this type of environmental performance, the potential burden of environmental reflexivity is eased by the help of routinised food consumption practices. There is not much normative engagement in environmental friendly food consumption, thus the bodily/mental procedures are different from the ones in the first type of environmental performance, ‘routinisation of reflexivity’. In ‘routinisation as relief from reflexivity’, routinisation keeps environmental doubts and reflections at bay, whereas in the type ‘routinisation of reflexivity’, routinisation takes care of including environmental reflexivity. One of the young consumers explains how the larger regulatory systems of society – such as public authorities - make sure that she can carry on in her own everyday life routines without having to engage in environmental reflexivity: “...*and when I take a glass of water from the tap, I don't think about how our ground water is dead polluted, because if it was so polluted, they would do something about it. Then they would say, don't drink the water from the tap.*” (Signe, female young, high school student). Here it is *not* a question of having incorporated a normative engagement into everyday agency, whereby it has become routinised as the case was in the empirical examples under the type ‘routinisation of reflexivity’. Rather,

agency is placed with other actors in society, presumed more powerful and responsible. This is a well-known tendency from the field of consumer trust (Halkier and Holm, 2004).

40 One of the parents tells the others in the focus group how she establishes her own routine procedures in order to stop worrying about environmentally related food risk:

“I think about such things as fruit and the like. You can’t assess it, when they say that it’s not sprayed. But I don’t believe very much in that, you know. I think it’s sprayed to some extent, all of it you know. But really, you can’t do anything else than – then you have to buy it and wash it and...eat it.” (Helle, female parent, nurse).

41 Here the relief from environmental reflections is achieved by installing own tacit everyday procedures in order to not have to doubt about choices and consequences. Thus, agency is placed with the practitioner herself, and the quote does not express much trust in other social actors.

Openings for environmentally friendly elements

42 Looking at the examples where environmentalised food consumption are seen as practices themselves, two out of three of the types could serve as openings for more environmentally friendly food consumption. ‘Routinisation of reflexivity’ is perhaps obvious, because here the engagement and normativity is already placed in environmental consideration in food consumption, and using bodily/mental procedures to routinise environmentally friendly consumption practices into whole activity packages makes it easier to organise in everyday life. ‘Routinisation as relief from reflexivity’ points to a type of consumption practice where the environmental performances depends upon public and private societal institutions to provide practical systems that makes it easy and normal for consumers to consume food in more environmentally friendly ways. This is an argument that is parallel to Elisabeth Shove about hygiene practices and use of resources (Shove, 2003).

43 However, the type ‘ambivalence between routinisation and reflexivity’ does not make easy openings for environmentally friendly food consumption, because the environmental claim on food consumption is understood as in conflict with the existing multiplicities of crossing practices, here also food practices.

Conclusion

44 Food consumption is a complex social phenomenon. Therefore it is not advisable for the discussions about ordinary food consumer’s position in relation

to sustainable consumption to understand consumption optimistically as only increasingly strong agency of the so called political consumer. Neither is it fruitful to understand consumption pessimistically as only increasingly disciplined or disoriented agency as in the governmentality argument. Both types of assumptions rest crucially upon assumptions about what other actors in society do (Hargreaves et al, 2007; Spaargaren, 2000). And both types of assumptions are too crude in themselves to understand the varieties of processes of everyday life dealings with environmentalised consumption.

45In a practice theoretical perspective, practitioner agency is always at the same time conditioned and capable of change, depending upon the specific social and practical constellations. Even within each of the two understandings of food consumption in a practice theoretical conceptualisation presented in the article (consumption as part of food practices and food consumption as practices), the agency capacities and the conditioning of agency are intertwined.

46Hence, I will argue the necessity of working with a double theoretical gaze on environmentalised food consumption: Environmentalised food consumption can be practices in themselves *and* environmentalised food consumption can be part of broader food practices. Each of these theoretical constructions carve out differently the mixing of the possibilities and conditions of consumer agency. The understanding of environmentalised food consumption as practices in themselves clarifies that there are very different types of food consumption, even within such a narrow field of food consumption as the environmentalised field. There is consumption where the environmentalised element is sufficiently integrated and identified with in order for other food practitioners to recognise it as something as basic as a social practice. On the other hand, there is environmentalised food consumption which is performed in piecemeal, adapted, do-able, ambivalent and changing ways, hereby in stead constituting specific performances as part of broader food practices.

47Both theoretical constructions thus contribute to an understanding of sustainable food consumption as potentially multi-relational and normal in everyday lives. This could contribute to more methodologically open designs for investigating the diversities in which ordinary food practitioners deal with the possible challenges of sustainability. In stead of assuming that food practitioners are either over-estimated strong social actors or under-estimated victims of social conditions.

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1 The other part of the data-material in the project consisted in a text-analysis of different types of relevant public texts on food risks, done as discursive repertoires (Potter and Whetherell, 1987) and narrative analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

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