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The Meaning of Origin

*A Cultural Analysis of the Consumers' Perception of Food
Origin*

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Abstract

The Meaning of Origin: A Cultural Analysis of the Consumers' Perception of Food Origin

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This thesis is based on the results of a consumer-based research project carried out with the Swedish anthropological consultancy firm Inculture. By investigating the material retrieved from the project, the researcher aims to uncover the cultural and social processes behind consumer choices and more specifically what meaning the culture-based idea and beliefs about food origin bares in Swedish society. To gather the empirical material, in-depth interviews and shop-alongs were conducted with eight informants. Additionally 40 short shop-along interviews were done with food store visitors in the city of Malmö. Using actor-network theory's notion of fluidity, this thesis demonstrates how food choices are not fixed and how the cultural meaning of food origin is highly contextual. It showed that the associations consumers have in Sweden with the cultural category food origin are positive and are often emotionally loaded.

Keywords: Food choices; Consumer choices; Food origin; Sweden; Actor-network theory; Consumer research; Applied cultural analysis; Ethnography; Food culture; Qualitative research

Abstract in Dutch

De betekenis van Oorsprong: Een Culturele Analyse van de Perceptie van Consumenten over Voedseloorsprong

Fabian Leysen Topelius

Deze masterproef is gebaseerd op de resultaten van een consument georiënteerd onderzoeksproject dat werd uitgevoerd in het kader van een samenwerkingsproject met het Zweedse antropologische adviesbureau Inculture. Door gebruik te maken van het verzamelde projectmateriaal, onthult de onderzoeker de culturele en sociale processen die schuil gaan achter de voedselkeuzes van consumenten. Meer bepaald, de onderzoeker achterhaalt welke culturele betekenis voedseloorsprong heeft voor consumenten in de Zweedse samenleving. Via diepte interviews en veldwerk bij acht informanten werd het empirisch materiaal verzameld. Het veldwerk bestond voornamelijk uit thuisbezoeken en het vergezellen tijdens het winkelen. Daarnaast werden 40 korte in situ interviews gedaan met willekeurige bezoekers van voedingswinkels in de stad Malmö. Door gebruik te maken van het begrip vloeibaarheid, een concept afkomstig uit de actor-netwerk theorie, benadrukt de masterproef hoe voedselkeuzes dynamisch zijn en hoe de culturele betekenis van voedseloorsprong erg contextueel afhankelijk is. Het resultaat van deze uitgebreide analyse wees erop dat de associaties die consumenten in Zweden maken met de oorsprong van voedsel, positief en vaak emotioneel geladen zijn.

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Malmö, 10-05-2018

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1. Introduction

What do I want? I stood in my local grocery store between the meat and cheese department. I had a hard time to decide what kind of topping I wanted for my sandwich. Definitely not meat. I had stopped buying meat for almost a year now. Maybe some kind of cheese, but what kind of cheese? A shout interrupted my thoughts: “No not those ribs!” I looked up and saw a young woman gesturing towards her friend. “Those are from Ireland, so we do not want them”. The man looked hesitant, but then said that she was probably right. I walked down to the freezer compartment and glanced over the ribs. I had to admit, the ribs did look good. Hell, there was even a fifty percent discount on them. I wondered why the woman was so certain she did not want those ribs, she had not even taken a closer look at them. It must have been the sign which was readable from afar: *Irländsk Högre* (*Irish Ribs*). The couple had moved to the vegetable department. The woman had a high pitched voice so it was not hard for me to overhear their conversation. They were deliberately picking only Swedish vegetables and fruits: Swedish celeriac, Swedish turnip, Swedish mushrooms and Swedish apples. In their shopping cart I noticed different Swedish food products. I was intrigued by their dedication to buy Swedish. At first I liked it, but on second thought, it appeared as somewhat fanatical to me. I strolled back to the fridge compartment. I stood there for a while and gazed at the cheeses. Then finally, I picked a cheese. It was *Västerbottenost*, and it was Swedish.

1.1 Background

“Behaviour around food consumption is typically explored because it gives insight into phenomena like mental categories, family formation, social distinction, personal identity, material culture or body management” (Warde, 2016, p. 29).

Choosing food is not a simple errand. Not only are there a variety of different products, there are also many labels and guidelines, norms and social pressures that affect people and the choices they make. In the store there are products that satisfy all needs - Fairtrade coffee, organic oranges, Swedish crispbread, local milk, ham without preservatives and so on. How do consumers then know what they want in this enormous range of available products and how do they make their choices? It seems to me all these food concepts create one disorientation rather than actual clarity.

Food preferences are an important aspect of food consumption. Food preferences are socially designed phenomenon where consumers and producers’ ideas about what is good to

eat are complex social beliefs that include thinking about identity, belonging, humanity, social and environmental responsibility, health and body ideals. Foods are goods, and as Katarina Graffman & Jacob Östberg (2018) tell us in their book *Vi är vad vi köper* (We are what we buy), goods are an important way through which individuals shape their identity. Through food, we communicate “who we are, where we came from, and what we want to be” (Belasco, 2008, p. 27).

Different food preferences have become known and accepted in recent years. One such change over the past 30 years is the increase of commercially produced gluten free food (Cridland, 2017). But also home delivered food, raw, artisanal, detox, slow food, organic and locally produced – just to name a few. These concepts have been created to satisfy different needs of consumers and to create new needs for consumers. Food consumers are important actors when it comes to creating different types of food.

The field of consumer food choices is an important area of food and consumer research that can offer valuable insight and knowledge into food consumption. This thesis is based on the results of a consumer-based research project I carried out with the anthropological consultancy firm Inculture. The latter research project was setup and conducted for two food producers that wanted to know what market direction they should take in the near future. The project plan stated that over the last ten to fifteen years there has been a dramatic change in how people relate to food. Driving factors have been health trends, as well as concerns surrounding climate- and environmental. In other words, the two companies needed information from consumers that could help them define their corporate strategy. How are their products perceived and what do consumers generally want when shopping for groceries? The project investigated the meaning of food origin for consumers by focusing on consumer’s choices during store visits. Under a three months period all results were gathered, analyzed and presented to the two clients. A key finding from the research revealed that consumers interpret food origin as something positive that gives them guidance when choosing food. By investigating the ethnographic material retrieved from the research project, this thesis will strive to uncover and delineate the cultural and social processes behind consumer choices and more specifically what meaning the cultural category food origin bears in Swedish society.

1.2 The food industry and origin

What is origin and why is it important in a discussion about the food industry? Food origin simply put, is a geographical indication used on products which corresponds to a specific geographical location or origin. The use of a geographical indication may act as a certification

that the product possesses certain qualities, that it is made according to traditional methods, or that it enjoys a certain reputation, due to its geographical origin. In other words, origin is a product attribute that affects the meanings consumers associate with food (Luomala, 2007).

It is apparent that the effect of country-of-origin is an extensively researched topic in global marketing and consumer behaviour (Pharr, 2005; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Despite the abundance few studies examine the effect of origin information or country of origin information, on actual food choice behaviors (Luomala, 2007). In addition almost all of the studies are quantitative, an exception is Luomala's (2007) study which combines both quantitative and qualitative methods "to address under-explored research questions" (p. 123). The latter study makes a distinction of different levels on which consumers give meaning to origin. Consumers attach and associate, partly overlapping partly distinct, cognitive, affective and normative meanings to food of various origins. Verlegh and van Ittersum (2001) were the first ones to divide the meaning of origin into cognitive, affective and normative aspects. Cognitive refers to the beliefs that are associated with the geographic origin of a product, while affective aspects refer to the feelings or emotions that are evoked by the place of origin. Normative aspects relate to personal and social norms regarding the purchase and use of products from a particular origin (Verlegh & van Ittersum, 2001). To be clear, in this study I will not make such distinctions between different aspects of how consumers give meaning to origin because my study belongs to the field of cultural studies. My interest lies in achieving a better understanding of the cultural meaning of food origin and I therefore see no value in making such distinctions nor to further investigate these aspects. Also, most of the previously conducted empirical studies are not done in people's everyday context, but are performed in a controlled environment (Luomala, 2007). Graffman and Östberg (2018) tell us that "a fundamental assumption behind these types of research traditions is that there is an objective reality ready to be uncovered if you only use the right methods" (p. 18). My work differs because this study is an ethnographic study, solely based on qualitative methods, on the effects of food origin on consumer choices in an everyday context. It does not only take into account the objective decisions consumers make, but also tries to uncover the complex underlying cultural patterns of the subjective choices they make.

The study is one of the first in its genre, but what more reasons are there for wanting to contribute to the vast amount of previously done research on the topic? Why is doing research about food origin in relation to consumers still relevant and why is it becoming an even more

relevant topic for today's food industry? In order to answer this we must first take a look at the contemporary food system.

In what follows I will discuss the characteristics of the contemporary food system based on the chapter *The Phenomenology of Food Consumption* by Matthew Day (2014) and the article *Doing food differently: reconnecting biological and social relationships through care for food* by Elizabeth Dowler, Moya Kneafsey, Rosie Cox and Lewis Holloway (2009). The chosen chapter and the article were soothing for they complement each other with descriptions of the modern global food market and with additional information of how the contemporary food system came into being. The discussed characteristics are important for us to know since they draw the background in which this study is situated and executed.

First, according to Day (2014) a new type of human relationship came to be by the creation of mass food production along with the eventual branding and marketing of food products during the Industrial Revolution between 1760 and 1820. This new relationship is called conspicuous digestion, a concept based on the idea of the eighteenth century social philosopher and economist Adam Smith. It refers to the idea that people pay for goods and services not out of real need, but rather to display income and wealth. The goal of the consumption is to achieve or maintain a social status.

Second, Dowler et al. (2009) describe how the harnessing of science and technology in the contemporary food system establishes a tight and vertical control owned by an increasing centralization of commercial and intellectual power in transnational corporations. They come to control seeds, planting, tending, harvesting and processing specifications. Many producers have lost autonomy, they are merely small players in the major global systems, which are largely dominated by economic managers and corporate buyers.

The third characteristic is related to the second. Here the literature tells us that food is produced largely on a two tiered system. Most of the food consumed is produced by multinational corporations using industrial agriculture and intensive farming practices designed to maximize output. This is called the mainstream or conventional modern global system. It is primarily in the mainstream food system this study has to be situated. The mainstream is one where power and management are concentrated in fewer and fewer multi- or transnational corporations. This is one where economic efficiency and rationality are key to driving profits, so that increased market share and shareholder gain success. Of lesser focus in this study is the so called alternative system. This one is characterized by assorted diverse, smaller scale enterprises and initiatives, led sometimes by producers, sometimes by consumers,

which may have very different goals and philosophies from each other, as well as from the mainstream.

Fourth, returning to the conventional food system, food produced and sold has to be safe and consistent (in appearance, taste, handling) and is increasingly presented divorced from production realities. For instance, vegetables are washed, fruit may be peeled, meat and fish are gutted or shorn of indicators of actor origin and wrapped in plastic. The process reaches its apotheosis in the commonly named ready meal, “the purchaser can notionally choose from any number of international or historical cuisines, but need only remove outer packaging and place in a conventional or microwave oven to consume; no further knowledge, skill or engagement is required” (Dowler et al., 2009, p. 202).

Fifth, another marked feature is the divorcing of food from the biological. The drive is to make it uniform (remove as much natural variation as possible, carrots are always orange, and largely taste the same), safe (containing as few contaminants as possible, and as good for consumer health as possible with minimum effort on the consumers’ part) and predictable in processing, appearance, cost, preparation and taste.

As a result of the contemporary food system and its characteristics, there is a noticeable distancing which people experience in their understanding of and relationship to food. This separation has become subject to a growing academic attention (Day, 2014; Dowler et al., 2009). It is in answer to this apparent disconnection that there is a rising awareness of the importance of the origin of products. Burstedt, Fredriksson and Jönsson (2006) note that “a definition of the origin of food seems to convey a sense of security that counteracts the feeling of a distant and modernized food industry, especially when it comes to foods that are perceived as foreign” (p. 11). Food origin or the genealogy of food is an important prerequisite for incorporating food into its own culture. This way food origin can become a tool to reconnect consumers to the food they buy and consume. What has not yet been examined though is the effectiveness of this tool. For the tool’s working-power will always be dependent on the current cultural beliefs present in the consumer society. Therefore investigating what cultural meaning food origin has in consumers’ minds is highly relevant.

Especially for food producers this study is a valuable investigation. For in the contemporary food system the harnessing of science and technology, for instance genetic engineering or GMO, ensures that the natural order in the world shifts between solid and fluid. The modern food system thus challenges some established boundaries between nature and culture, between climate and politics, between natural sciences and the social sciences and humanities. The meanings consumers attach to different types of food are in a constant state of

flux, because it is about how we as consumers culturally classify and divide the world. Just as it is about how we as consumers culturally classify what food origin is. Investigating the fluid meaning of origin is therefore not only relevant, but it is a necessity for food producers that are grounded in the fast changing modern global food system.

Examining the meaning of food origin is useful for food companies, but I also see use for it in a broader societal context. By discussing aspects of the contemporary modern food system, the places where consumption takes place and the group community that consumption gives rise to, I want people to see the system we are all inevitably part of. Not necessarily to start revolting against this system, not to subversively disrupt the system in favor of anything else, but to offer tools for self-understanding. What are we humans really doing? Only after we have gained such an understanding can we start thinking about how we want it, if there are aspects of our current way of acting that may be counterproductive and that simply do not lead to anything good for anyone. Having knowledge of what meaning food origin has for the consumer helps us to become more aware of the current food system and it can help open up an exploratory road to rethink food consumption.

1.3 Aim of the thesis

This thesis addresses the decisions that consumers make in food stores in Sweden on a daily basis. The aim is to study how consumers in their everyday life act in relation to the food they buy and to examine the connection between the consumers idea of what food origin is. This is operationalized by drawing on ethnographic material from the consumer research project, that was carried out for the anthropological consultancy firm Inculture, to compose an analysis around the fluid meaning of origin. The two main themes running through this thesis are food and consumers.

The research question thus asks:

- How does the consumer's idea and beliefs of what origin means work as a fluid actor in relation to food and consumers?

Two sub-questions are asked in order to answer this larger overarching issue: How does origin as a fluid actor affect the consumer's choices in food stores? How does the actor origin work as a Swedish marketing tool?

1.4 Overview of the thesis

To answer these questions the thesis is structured in four chapters. A description of the fieldwork and the used methods will be provided in the methods chapter, followed by a theoretical framework that supports the analysis of the material in the two empirical chapters. From there, I will present the empirical material that has been divided into; a first chapter that is focused on the consumer perception of food origin, more specifically the affect food origin has on consumer choices. A second chapter that is also focused on the consumer perception of origin, but focusses on how food origin works as a Swedish marketing tool.

2. Methods and Material

2.1 Entering the field and the informants

Inculture provides ethnographic research and anthropological analysis on contemporary culture, trends and branding. They forecast, track and map human behaviour which provides an insight to culture and it allows companies to customise brand experience. They meet with the clients, communicate with the clients, negotiate with them and soon after deliver a project proposal. This means I was left out of deciding which research strategies would be used and I was left out on deciding how and where the research would be conducted. After the client negotiations, Inculture had sent me a concrete project plan of the research project therefore we signed a contract stating my main responsibilities. Having decided from the beginning what I was expected to do for the company meant I could start working from day one and start planning the execution of my main task, to gather most of the empirical material for the project. In this thesis I only draw on the material I personally gathered during the project, any other relevant project material gathered by research colleagues is consciously left out.

Commissioned by Inculture, my material was produced in three ways. First, through semi-structured long interviews with eight food consumers in Sweden. According to Charlotte Davies (2008) semi-structured interviews have the advantage that they are open-ended and are not restricted to the preconceived notions of the ethnographer. These interviews were all conducted in the informants' homes to not only make them feel more comfortable, but also to account for their everyday rituals and to be able to do pantry observations.



Figure 1. Pantry observation, interview Johan

After each interview a next meeting with the informant was planned to go out for grocery shopping together. This second method is the go-along, but I will refer to it as the shop-along. The go-along method differs from traditional methods such as participant observation and interviewing for it has the potential to access some of the transcendent and reflexive aspects of lived experience in situ (Kusenbach, 2003). The informants were therefore asked to do their groceries at the stores they usually go to. It served to provide me with reflexive aspects of my informants of their daily shopping and product choice making.

The third method is shop-along interviews. I am referring to my methodology as shop-along interviews rather than just observations or short interviews, because, the first step of the method was to observe a consumer in the food store environment while he/she was engrossed in the everyday praxis of grocery shopping. Based on my observation I then approached the store customer to ask questions about their behavior and product choices. Similar to the go-along method, this method gives access to the lived experiences of the consumers in situ.

The intent behind the mixed method approach was to include a wide range of male and female voices that had some type of interest in food and cooking and to reach a range of voices between the age 23 to 60. I also have the experience and carry the knowledge of an ethnographic research project conducted in 2017 in five different countries on how labels of food origin are potential tools to reconnect consumers and (local) food producers and their products. I conducted auto-ethnography when shopping for groceries which, in this thesis, I shortly draw on in the section 5.1 Swedishness only to strengthen my ethnographic story. I read news articles and scientific articles mostly promoting, but also doubting the functionality of food origin. These are less important than the empirical material, but served as important elements of orienting myself within the field.

The first component of fieldwork was to recruit eight informants. Since everybody eats and everybody buys food, it was not hard for me to frame a target group for my research. But as mentioned above, the intent was to choose from a group that had some type of interest in food and cooking. These were both food enthusiasts and people with relatively little interest in food. The desired age had to be between 23 and 60 years old, which means students were included but children were excluded. The age of focus was specifically requested by the two clients of Inculture. Because of a confidentiality agreement I cannot go in to the specific reasons for this. The initial aim was to choose according to geographical distance inside Sweden, in order to compare possible differences between a rural and urban perception of food origin. Once recruitment started there was primarily one difficulty that arose: my limited social network in

Sweden and time budget meant there was little possibility to make the necessary trips to rural places in Sweden. Therefore my research colleague from Inculture, who had a wider social network, decided to focus on rural areas while I focused on the urban areas in southern Sweden; Lund and Malmö. This means the used empirical material in this thesis is limited to urban areas in southern Sweden. As ethnologist Laura Hirvi (2012) writes "...the field cannot simply be understood as a spatially bounded location. Rather, I conceptualize the field as being made up of people and their practices, material objects and social sites" (p. 25). My field was certainly not bounded to one location, but the field was easy to define for me since it was confined to mostly food stores and people's homes in the cities Malmö and Lund.

The study attempted to recruit informants with a variety of food interest. For this I contacted acquaintances and put up flyers at a bicycle shop and a food store in Malmö. This strategy worked out well and in the end I was able to compose a group of consumers diverse in age and with a distinct interest in food; varying from a professional cook, a bicycle mechanic who barely cooked but was planning to eat more healthy, a student with poor economics but who certainly was a convinced vegetarian to a hobby cook that cooked food from scratch. Less attention was given by me to find male and female interviewees in equal numbers. My research colleague had more female than male candidates, therefore I recruited, in agreement with my colleague, six male and two female informants. This way the overall research project executed for Inculture consisted of an equal number of male and female informants. This means my empirical material, where the thesis is based upon, and that arose from the interviews and shop-alongs, in majority comes from male respondents.

In the following my informants are listed and displayed by name, age and residency. Subsequently they are accompanied by a short description of their socio-economic background that is based upon the information forms they filled in at the beginning of each interview (see appendix 1):

Einar 23 years, Lund – Studies to become a doctor and lives with his girlfriend. He is a vegetarian and eats healthy. He is very sporty: cycles a lot and goes to the fitness center. His father is a professor in Lund and his mother is a member of the parliament.

Anna 26 years, Malmö - Studies urban studies in Malmö. She is flexitarian, eats some meat occasionally. Anna is from Finland, but she has lived in Sweden for several years. Her father is a farmer. She thinks much about what she eats. There should be a good balance of different items in the food.

Josef 33 years, Malmö – Studied engineering but then took over his father's bicycle shop in

Malmö and is now working full time there. Interested in food. He has eaten unhealthy during the summer, but will “eat super healthy” in the fall as he wants to become a star in boxing again.

Johan 38 years, Malmö - Been a cook for 16 years, has a partner, no children. Does grocery shopping for his work every day. He has a farm out in Österlen where he grows his own vegetables and eating them is the best there is. He is a musician and goes to yoga.

Marcus 40 years, Lund – Stock manager, partner, no children. Marcus usually does the cooking at home and most of the groceries. Is interested in food. Has played high-level frisbee and still invests a lot of his time in sports.

Hanna 41 years, Lund - Architect, partner, no children. Her parents are Icelandic. Wants to be a vegetarian, but she is not because her partner likes meat too much. Very sporty person. Likes to bake, but dislikes shopping food.

Lars 52 years, Malmö - Concept developer, divorced with one child, daughter 9 years old. Cooks a lot of food from scratch and likes to go out eating with his daughter, at least twice a week. Is a hobby cook and a reasonably aware consumer.

Håkan 59 years, Malmö - Self-employed and interior designer, has a creation and production agency. He has three children between 25 and 32 years old. Married to Ulla, a teacher at the University of Gothenburg. Håkan likes to cook in the presence of good friends.

2.2 Interviews and shop-alongs

Semi-structured, long interviews form the bulk of this paper’s empirical material. The interviews were conducted in the homes of my informants. The respondents ranged from 23 to 60 years old, and all had some type of interest in food. When producing the empirical data, I used a recording device to record the interviews. Then I did a word-for-word transcription to distance the material. As the material then was written in Swedish, I translated it through meaning condensation, rather than staying true to the actual wording. Any quotes in this thesis should therefore be understood as representations of my interpretive translation of what the informants said during the interviews (Benjamin, 1997; Wolfinger, 2002).

Through the long interview method one can describe what a phenomenon, such as food origin, actually has for values and what kind of associations it is linked with. To achieve better knowledge of this method I consulted the book *The long interview*, written by anthropologist Grant McCracken (1988), and used it to a great extent as a manual during the research project. McCracken describes how the powerful method “can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world” (p. 9). He

explains how it takes us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. My task was to highlight the symbolic and cultural practices that surround food origin, a brand, behaviour or a community.

McCracken suggests that long interviews are based on the interviewer having a certain structure in the conversation without posing leading questions. My interviews were thus semi-structured, meaning I had a core list of questions and topics I sought to discuss, but the path to those topics was flexible. This allowed me to tailor the interview to the interest and experience of the respondent. The questions were slightly different for someone busy with daily (professional) activities concerning food than for a person with a less active interest in food. The semi-structured approach also allowed topics and issues I had not considered to arise over the course of the discussion, such as the nationalistic component of food origin due to the sociocultural image of right-wing politics.

Prior to the conduct of the interviews, an interview guide (see appendix 2) was thus created with a list of overall topics for discussion aiming at encouraging the interviewee to speak rather than responding briefly to specific questions. These types of questions are appropriate for so-called long interviews. The interviewer takes a more passive role in what is more like a conversation about a variety of topics, but the interviewer has the opportunity to follow up the answers with questions such as “why do you think so?”, “how do you mean?” or “how come?” so that the interviewee will clarify how he/she is reasoning (McCracken, 1988). This way a thicker description of the interviewee’s understanding and perception of the subject, concept or phenomenon in question can be interpreted and several layers of meaning (signification and content) can be distinguished. The interviews lasted anywhere between one to three hours, and eight persons were interviewed.

In addition to this long interview, I followed the informants, as they visited a familiar grocery store, to observe how they acted in the store. This ethnographic method is known as the go-along, but I call it the shop-along. I accompanied them from their houses all the way to the store and then back home. I observed their routines and behaviour prior to the grocery shopping; such as making grocery lists, consulting food recipes online etc. Afterwards it appeared that most of the relevant project material I acquired from this method was obtained inside the food stores. The material gained from the shop-along experiences outside the stores was of lesser importance. The method gave me the opportunity to accompany individual informants in their natural routines, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their familiar store environment. According to Kusenbach (2003) what makes the

go-along technique unique is that ethnographers are able to observe their informants' spatial practices in situ while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time. Using the go-along method thus gives the ability to see into lives as they are lived.

The method offers the opportunity to consciously reflect on how people in the store behave, as people engage in different practices and move from product to product. The respondents become involved and engaged in the shop-along method. Their reflections about product choices, reflections about themselves, become the key to your understanding. However in making the respondents become your partners in the research, they also become performers. Them being performers is not necessarily a bad thing, although this is easily believed. As Patricia Sunderland and Rita Denny (2007) explain to us, a respondent performing does not make the material any less real since performances are culturally telling and revealing. In the study there were two occasions it was obvious that the informant performed or acted in a certain way because of my presence as a researcher, but both times the performance lead to valuable material. An ethnographer has to keep in mind that the choice of what is said and done by the informant is always informed by sociocultural context, history and situation (Sunderland & Denny, 2007). It is then the task of a cultural analyst to uncover these layers and interpret them.

Obviously the shop-along technique is not a naturally occurring social occasion. Kusenbach (2003) says it is rather unlikely that informants are accompanied on their routine practices by acquaintances who engage them in discussing their perceptions and interpretations of the physical and social environment. In this sense the method might feel staged to the informant, since he/she is asked to do (routine) practices inside a familiar environment. There can be no doubt that both methods, interviews and shop-alongs are always contrived social situations that disturb the unfolding of ordinary events. Both methods intentionally aim at capturing the stream of perceptions, emotions and interpretations that informants usually keep to themselves. The presence and curiosity of someone else undoubtedly intrudes upon and alters this delicate, private dimension of lived experience.

2.3 Shop-along interviews

Empirical material also came from short interviews conducted in four different grocery stores in Malmö. I am referring to this methodology as shop-along interviews, rather than just short interviews, because, similar to the go-along method I tried to catch people's lived experiences in the store. By first observing and subsequently interfering with the consumer's stream of thoughts, I gained access to their perceptions and interpretations. Although observations were done first without the respondents knowing, their consent to use the material was always asked

after the short interview was done. The shop-along interviews at the store highlighted how consumers categorized food origin and how they picked food in stores.

For this method, four stores of different sizes and of different retail companies were selected. The selected retail corporations are well known companies in Sweden and the stores should therefore be seen as part of the conventional modern food system instead of the alternative food system (Dowler et al., 2009). The size of the stores were considered in order to have different sorts of stores and to reach different kinds of food shoppers. In each store ten consumers were shortly interviewed, both men and women of various ages, which means forty shop-along interviews were conducted in total. In the following I list the stores with a short description:

ICA: The first store in Malmö, where fieldwork was conducted, was ICA Maxi in Västra Hamnen. The store was a big supermarket offering clothes, leisure products, food and much more. In the food department there were organic, Swedish, locally produced and conventional products.

Hemköp: In the medium sized store in Hemköp at Värnhem, the range of ecological and Swedish products was wide. Many food consumers who shopped there were positive to organic and Swedish.

Coop: In the local grocery store in Coop Kirseberg the range of products was rather small, but still the shop had ecological alternatives for most products. Although the prices in the store were not cheap, there was a steady flow of customers that shopped in Coop. Most of the customers lived in the neighbourhood Kirseberg and went there for smaller groceries. It was noticeable that the staff knew most of the customers.

Willys: Willys Katrinelund was a large grocery store and, in comparison with Coop and Hemköp, this was a store where customers went for large purchases. What attracted customers to Willys were the low prices and the wide range of food products.

2.4 Ethical considerations

This thesis uses the consumers' perception of food and food categories, and as such I am dealing with a topic that has a medical dimension. Information dealing with individual health is sensitive. The focus of the thesis, and thus the focus of my questions during interviews was not about individual experiences of health. Of course, for some health was intertwined with how they experienced certain foods, and issues related to health did arise as a result. Therefore

I want to emphasize that the focus of the interviews was not medical treatment, but how they perceived food categories and how they navigated in food stores in their everyday life.

The names of the store respondents and the informants used in the thesis have not been altered, since they gave me their consent to use their first names and their ages. Every store respondent has been assigned a number and I am the only one with access to the number code. Few store respondents asked for anonymity, but for those who did I have left out their names and altered it to their gender.

Additionally, I recognize that choices regarding the selected literature has been made on my personal language abilities as a researcher. Therefore the literature used in this thesis is western literature.

3. Theoretical Frame work

The purpose of this section is to set up a theoretical lens. I will first outline the actor-network theory and introduce the notion of fluidity. I will then move on to outline the experience economy. The actor-network theory will guide the entire analysis, but other theoretical perspectives will be added throughout the thesis to expand the analysis.

3.1 ANT and fluidity

I introduce the actor-network theory which is known as a material-semiotic approach. Two prominent developers of the theory are Bruno Latour and John Law. Law (2007) explains in his article *Actor-Network Theory and Material Semiotics* that the approach treats everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. The approach describes the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors including objects, subjects, human beings, machines, nature, ideas, organisations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements. Actor-network successor projects appear to have been done in many different ways and draw on a range of theoretical resources. They are located in many different case studies, practices and locations.

A good example of such a successor project can be found in the article *The Zimbabwe Bush Pump: Mechanics of a Fluid Technology* wherein Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol (2002) introduce the idea of a fluid technology. They describe the specific quality of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump as fluid. The pump is solid and mechanical and yet, as they argue, its boundaries are vague and moving, rather than being clear or fixed. Both the pump and the idea about food origin are tools that help people in their everyday life. The Bush Pump is a

technology that generates water, but it does not do just that. It is called a fluid technology for, as de Laet and Mol discuss, the tool does more than most pumps do. How both food origin and the pump act and work as tools is context dependant. The origin of food in food stores is also a tool with specific qualities that are vague and moving, but unlike the pump, it is not necessarily solid in its nature. Food origin is not always solid in its nature nor are its boundaries fixed. Food is the end product of a larger production network. In this network, origin is a contextual actor that is much variable over time and variable over place. Therefore I want to mobilize the metaphor of fluidity to talk of food origin and claim that it acts as an actor. Subsuming food origin under the category of actor broadens the category, allowing it to include non-human, non-rational entities. The new actor, Origin, is not well-bounded but entangled, in terms of both its performance and its nature, in a variety of worlds. Food origin is an abstract concept that refers to the beginning of certain food. Although the cultural category of food origin might not be an entity per se, it can get formed in an entity and work as a tool; a label of origin for example. In this work I make a distinction between Origin and origin. To make clear when it is specifically the actor that is performing I will call the actor by its name and refer to it with Origin.

Crucial to new material semiotics and the actor-network approach is performativity. Besides Origin's fluid nature, there is Origin's fluid performance. Annemarie Mol (1999) writes in her article *Ontological politics. A word and some questions* how actor network theory and its semiotic relatives have reshaped ontology. They have reshaped it by underlining that the reality we live with is performed in a variety of practices. Mol moves from perspectivalism to performance within the actor-network-theory. Perspectivalism is against the singularity of the single truth voiced by one expert. In this case there are many experts or visions that construct the perception of the reality of food origin, but they look at origin from different standpoints. Instead of different perspectives on a single phenomenon, Mol promotes the idea of phenomena performed in different versions. The radical consequence of this is that reality itself is multiple. An implication of this might be that there are options between various versions of origin.

Håkan Jönsson (Burstedt et al., 2006) examines how origin has a changeable meaning. Which I see as equal to actor Origin's fluid performance. Jönsson says that all sorts of food alludes to a certain form of origin, which is something that has become increasingly important in working as a sales argument. However, the origin associated with the foods are different. He explains this by comparing the origin of three different kinds of dairy products in Sweden; milk, cheese and yoghurt. For milk the connection to the indigenous nationality is

important, during the interbellum milk became a national symbol in Sweden. The Swedish milk acts to be a means of assuring safety against the potentially dangerous unknown. For cheese the nationality is more or less indifferent. Instead, the authenticity which connects to a certain location, county or region, preferably located far away, is significant. In this case origin becomes a direct link to taste, working as a reference to both the taste in your mouth and as a way of showing that you have good taste, as in knowing how authentic cheese should taste and where it should come from. For yoghurt origin acts less important, at least the importance of the place of production and the location on the packaging coincides less than with cheese (Burstedt et al., 2006).

Thus the fluidity of actor Origin's working order is not a matter of interpretation. It is built into the Origin entity or tool itself. This is not an accident because each Origin entity is made that way by regulations and food producers. For Origin is neither active nor passive, but something in between. It is what I describe as a dormant actor. In other words, food origin works as a dormant attribute of a food product. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* we are to understand the actors property as the following:

Dormancy, state of reduced metabolic activity adopted by many organisms under conditions of environmental stress or, often, as in winter, when such stressful conditions are likely to appear.... mechanism used by some organisms to avoid stressful environmental conditions is that of dormancy, during which an organism conserves the amount of energy available to it and makes few demands on its environment (Mayer, 2018).

Applying the description of dormancy to actor Origin would mean that dormancy is a mechanism used by Origin to avoid stressful environmental conditions, during which the actor conserves the amount of energy available to it and makes few demands on its environment. Origin can thus alter to a state of reduced activity, which is neither active nor passive but what I call a dormant state of being. Why not just call it a passive actor? Even though the actor might not make any immediate noticeable demands on its environment, Origin appears to be always active. The one kind of activity which the actor firmly stands for is attending, being attuned, and adapting to what happens to Origin in the world-out-there. For the Origin entity is both dormant and fluid, dissolving into its surroundings.

When composing an ethnographic work about the perception of food origin in Sweden two articulations of origin come to mind. First, the creators of food origin. Although origin is

imposed on the creators, it works at least two ways. The creating actors are food producers that can employ origin as a productive tool for market forces while then simultaneously speaking to the intimate, sensory apprehension of and semiotic significance given to being in location. How do the creators value origin and how do they articulate the origin story? In this case Origin's performance is both digital and corporal. Its digital performance can be on social media; when creators make an advertisement on Facebook that is related to food origin for example. In this case the actor Origin steers the creators' market forces and it speaks for them. By navigating the creators, Origin mutates into the shape of an advertisement and will additionally even try to navigate the consumers.

This brings us to the second articulation, the consumers of origin. Consumers are important actors when it comes to creating different types of food. Thus what meaning does the cultural category origin bear in Swedish society? How does the actor Origin influence the consumer's understanding of what food origin is?

How can we understand these two articulations of origin? In *Ontological Politics* Mol (1999) discusses how it has always been assumed that reality is not entirely immutable. The term politics stands for the process of shaping, and the fact that its character is both open and contested. What actor-network theory should do is reveal the elements that make up reality. It should reveal the elements of reality that are well-set and those which are still-to-be formed. This means that reality is located in the historical, the material and the cultural. An example of locating a reality can be found in Frida Hastrup's (2015) article *To the Lighthouse – Making a Livable World by the Bay of Bengal* wherein she analyses a policy note from the Tamil Nadu Government Fisheries Department. Hastrup analyses the note in a way that can be understood as discourse analysis. This is not strange since Law (2007) writes that "actor-networks" can be seen as scaled down versions of Michel Foucault's discourses or epistemes: "Foucault asks us to attend to the productively strategic and relational character of epochal epistemes. The actor-network approach asks us to explore the strategic, relational, and productive character of particular, smaller-scale, heterogeneous actor-networks" (p.6).

My task is to find valuable empirical material by locating the material, historical and cultural, in these two articulations of origin. The empirical material that craft a version of truth are often extracted from various material tools. As highlighted above, these tools, such as the policy note, manipulate reality in the course of a diversity of practices. Tools for origin can be anything which helps the performance of Origin, such as a legislation surrounding origin, a label of origin, consumer perception of origin or maybe a restaurant preparing only food from a certain origin.

Origin thus performs in several different ways and yet it is all related. The idea about food origin is done and enacted by the creators and the consumers. These are aspects of a single category that are linked, so how do they relate? In this thesis I will focus on only one specific performance of Origin to go deeper into the meaning of origin. That is the performance done by the actor Origin in relation to the consumers in food stores. How does the fluid actor Origin make consumers perceive the origin of food in special ways?

3.2 Origin and the experience economy

The economists Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (1999) have written about the importance of customer experiences in the economy. When a customer buys an experience, according to Pine and Gilmore, he/she pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages to engage the consumer in a personal way. For a company to be successful it no longer suffices to provide services. To compete and grow successfully companies need to offer some kind of experience together with the commodities, goods or services they are selling. Nevertheless this does not mean that experiences rely exclusively on entertainment; entertainment is only one aspect of experience. Rather, “companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 3). They claim that experiences are the new distinct kind of economic output coming to the fore in a new emerging economy, which is what they call the experience economy.

In the book *Upplevelsens materialitet* redacted by Tom O’Dell (2002) ten authors contribute to the discussion about the experience economy, the latter based on Pine and Gilmore’s management theory, but they do this from an ethnographic angle. Similar to these authors I draw on the experience economy to elaborate on the actor Origin in the second chapter of this thesis The Origin Experience. My intention is to examine how staged experiences were present in the research environment, in the food stores and in product sales, and how the experience economy stands in relation to the actor Origin and the food consumers. There are three overall aspects in the book *Upplevelsens materialitet* that are useful and clarify why I apply the experience economy as a frame in this thesis.

First, experiences are both cultural and psychological. There have been many efforts to get an understanding of the psychological effects of experiences on human beings. However, for this thesis I am more interested in the social and cultural anatomy of experiences and their economy. As Löfgren describes it “we neither have nor can be given experiences. We make them in a highly personal way of taking impressions, but in this process we use a great deal of

established and shared cultural knowledge and frames” (Löfgren in O’Dell, 2002, p. 11). My task thus lies in understanding experiences as cultural phenomena that are shared, sought and which have their own material anchorages. Also here I choose to focus on the materiality surrounding us as consumers which leads to a better understanding of the zeitgeist we live in, instead of focussing on the individual’s impressions. Even personal inner feelings and experiences get their shape and are noticeable when people talk about them, when observing people and when they interact with the material world. Material, by its very nature, reflects the culture of the time in which it is created (Hegel, 2012).

Second, it is the consumer’s experience that is of particular interest to me. In the book the authors debate how there has been a tendency to put all too much emphasis on production issues and on the expenses of the consumption side in the economy. Therefore they saw the need to reintroduce the consumer into the picture. Their need to reintroduce the consumer very much overlaps with my need to introduce the experience economy. Namely, it was not to shift their theoretical and empirical focus from production to consumption but “to emphasize how closely intertwined consumption and production processes are with each other” (O’Dell, 2002, p. 17).

Third, if we approach the genealogy of the term experience O’Dell (2002) points out how the word experience is difficult to translate to Swedish since its meaning derives from two different words in Swedish; namely *uppleva* and *erfara*. In English the term experience thus has two distinct meanings. Firstly, to experience something means ‘to be directly involved in something’. What is important is that the experience is related to a direct happening. Secondly, the term means ‘to become aware of or to gain knowledge of your own experience’. In this case the experience is related to knowledge, to become experienced or someone who has experienced a lot. Note that the temporality of both meanings is slightly different. The first meaning of experience refers more to the senses, feelings and is connected to an occurrence, a happening. It is this form of experience that is discussed in the first section Swedishness of the second chapter in the analysis. The second meaning of experience refers to the gained knowledge by an experience. In order to be experienced you need to have reflected upon an experience. This definition of experience is of particular interest in the second section The experienced consumer of the second chapter.

The experiences of consumers are of primary subject in the analysis. Additionally my own experiences as a consumer, are reflected upon, drawn into the analysis and also belong to the ethnographic material. This is merely done to strengthen my ethnographic story and to make it more decisive. For this I draw upon *Doing Sensory Ethnography* by Sarah Pink (2009).

Given that the material reality of different food stores and food products are approached by me and the centrality of my experience is what brings ethnographic knowledge, this focus demands a short elaboration. Pink says sensory ethnography recognizes the emplaced ethnographer as her or himself part of a social, sensory and material environment and acknowledges the political and ideological agendas and power relations integral to the contexts and circumstances of ethnographic processes. Thus she pleads for a rethinking of the ethnographic process through a theory of place and space that can engage with both the phenomenology of place and the politics of space. To understand the design of food stores and most importantly the origin story articulated by the origin creators, it is important to focus on the senses since one of the goals of sensory ethnography is to come closer to understanding how people experience, remember and imagine. Pink writes how Downey pointed out that embodied knowledge is not simply “stored information” but that it involves biological processes (Pink, 2009, p. 37). In understanding embodiment Downey brings to the fore the idea of embodiment as a process that is integral to the relationship between humans and their environments. Thus the ethnographer’s way of thinking changes according to the environment and bodily experience.

4. Origin and Consumer Choices

Origin is fluid because it is variable over time (de Laet & Mol, 2002). Consequently, the consumer perception of food origin is fluid because it is variable over time. In order to understand how actor Origin works in food stores we need to take a look at the different versions of food origin and how it responds to the consumer’s choices. How does the fluid actor Origin affect the consumer’s choices in food stores? In the following I will present three sections that each examine actor Origin’s relationship with different aspects that have an influence on the consumer’s decision making in food stores. In the first section, 4.1 All these choices, I investigate how actor Origin stands in relation to the consumer’s choices, food products and product attributes. That is, how actor Origin tries to hold its own ground when it competes with all other products and product attributes in food stores. The second, 4.2 Trust and control, is focused upon the issues of trust and control in food stores and how actor Origin plays a role in these issues. The third section, 4.3 Healthism, examines the relation between actor Origin and the consumer’s identity.

4.1 All these choices



Figure 2. Willys, Swedish grocery store

The first thing I invite you to examine with me is how Origin relates to other (f)actors present in food stores. In a Swedish grocery store you are presented with aisle after aisle of food. You can get bananas, coffee, a hundred different kinds of cookies, frozen raspberries, tofu, steak, different kinds of yoghurt, and so on. Your choices are modified by factors such as packing and advertising, by cost, by taste, by personal history, by nutritional concerns, by desires to please others and by time pressures. These many factors influence the consumer's choice variably. Talia Welsh (2014) describes the hunt for food as a consumer's hunt. Obtaining food is no longer about the hunt, the search, or even the cultivation of crops or the raising livestock. The primary choice has become the consumer's choice (Welsh, 2014).

It is clear that the various labels found today create some confusion among consumers. For instance, Lars says that he had thought it would be very good if there had not been so "damn many labels of different kinds" (interview, Lars). Those who want to shop for food must always make different choices, which takes both energy and creates anxiety. This often leads consumers just to take what looks good. For others, the choices in the store are extremely conscious and planned. A 37-year-old woman I talked to in the store took an organic cream from *Skånemejerier* but quickly switched to the brand *Garant* when she saw that the organic cream from the latter brand was one crown cheaper. She said she tries to buy organic or locally produced, but "there are just so many choices, at some point one must come from the store as well" (shop-along interview, respondent 35).

Origin is one out of many actors in a food store. Burstedt et al. (2006) point out that the consumer's or individual's freedom of choice does not only mean the freedom to choose but

also entails a challenge. As a consumer you need to take a stand in everyday life. The constant decisions between different food products of different origin can therefore be perceived as problematic. The large number of products make it difficult to orientate yourself in a store, which can easily become confusing (Burstedt et al., 2006). In the supermarket or even at the stove, cost estimates and moral responsibilities are troubling the consumer's head. It is not just about what is cheaper or more expensive or how much food you get for your money, but also about the many trade-offs the consumer needs to make. These trade-offs are often concerns about global justice, environmental degradation, the well-being of the body or the well-being of your own wallet. Choosing a brand or a type of food in the store in front of others causes consumers to be reminded of their ethical responsibility towards their fellow human beings, the outside world, themselves and their children.

Anna, for example, tries to regularly look at the origin of a product. She says "I choose a product dependant on what country I want to support. I always choose what seems the most righteous in my eyes". She thinks a while and then says to me "there is so much going on in the store, there is too much to choose from and there is too much information. Eventually you just say fuck it and you think it does not matter what you buy" (interview, Anna). For a vast majority of consumers, many choices provide some kind of moral anxiety since each choice has positive and/or negative consequences.

For Britt Marie, a 71-year-old woman, it is important where a product comes from: "If tomatoes are ecological, but they come from Spain or Sweden, I will choose the Swedish ones". The feeling of buying locally produced food is that it is good food. "Swedish food feels more authentic, closer and I am more aware of where it comes from" (shop-along interview, respondent 8).

On Håkan, Origin works in a similar fashion, he prefers locally produced above organic products. Although he buys a lot of organic products, he says "it depends on whether I see any finesse in shopping ecologically. I see no meaning in shopping organic lamb from New Zealand" (interview, respondent Håkan). A good example of how the actor Origin performs and affects a consumer's choice is when Håkan wants to buy pork in an ICA-store. We are standing at the meat department and he says: "In some stores you can find pork in several rows, refrigerator compartments all the way down to the fruit. Here is not much" (shop-along interview, Håkan). Finally, he takes a packet of pork from the ICA brand. He does not want the *Tulip* brand because it is from Denmark. But when I ask him where the ICA pork comes from, he answers Sweden. He looks at the package and sees that it is not Sweden at all, but Holland. He thinks, puts back the ICA pork and takes another kind of pork that is from Sweden.

This example also tells us that some people take for granted that some brands have a certain origin, in this case a Swedish origin. Surely Håkan acted in a certain way because of my presence, but even though Håkan might be performing, it does not make the research material any less real since performances are culturally telling and revealing (Sunderland & Denny, 2007).

Another respondent, Lars, looks first and foremost if the product is organic, but if the product's origin is from too far away he does not take it: "There are many things that are sent from the other side of the world, I think you could stop eating litchi, you could stop eating raspberries all year long". When I ask Lars to prioritize what's most important to him he says organic as number one, but if the organic product has come from too far away then he will choose a locally produced one. As final option he chooses a product that has not traveled too far and which is not organic. The most important label for Lars is Fair Trade: "the most important thing about the food industry is that it should not be some kind of concentration camp for poor people that have become completely dependent on a company" (interview, Lars).

For Marcus, Swedish origin is at firsthand equal to local origin in a food store. He is happy to buy food from a local origin if he can because his driving force is to support Swedish companies. Marcus sees Swedish origin as equal to local origin, but not all consumers do. This points clearly towards Origin's fluid nature and performance in the consumer's perception (Burstedt et al., 2006; Mol, 1999). It appears that the actor takes on different forms of Origin; local Origin and Swedish Origin. The nature of Origin is different but how Origin performs towards Marcus is essentially the same. What Swedish origin means and how it relates to local origin will be examined further in the fifth chapter Swedishness.

As discussed in the introductory chapter The food industry and origin, one of the characteristics of the modern food system is the drive to make food uniform in stores (Dowler et al., 2009). An interesting aspect is that many informants imbed regularity with the concept of quality. A product should maintain a consistent standard otherwise the quality will be lost. An example is when Håkan stood in front of the lemons in the ICA-store. He had previously told me he needed lemons for dinner. As visible in the picture, the lemons available were either rickety looking ecological lemons (above) or shiny, uniform looking lemons (below). Both lemon

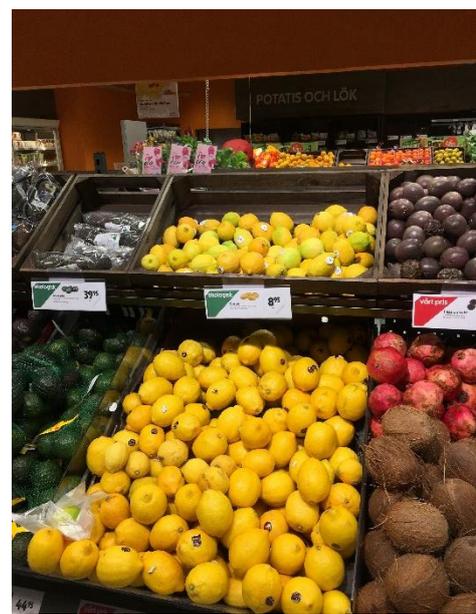


Figure 3. Lemons in ICA, shop-along Håkan

sorts originated from outside Europe. He felt at an organic lemon first, but then chose a non-organic lemon instead. It was apparent from the interview and from observing Håkan's grocery shopping that he buys mostly organic products, especially vegetables and fruits. His attitude can explain why organic does not get a quality trust in the same way as a product with a Swedish origin label. Most consumers are sensitive to the aesthetic, consumers shop with their eyes (Day, 2014). It is not uncommon that the organic produce sometimes looks a bit more deteriorated, especially with fruits and vegetables. This implicates that rickety organic lemons both consciously and unconsciously wear off on the consumer experience of the organic on a more general level.

Another aspect evident in this study is how consumers reason about price. Price is an important issue for many consumers. A constant characteristic of associations about the organic is a more expensive price, but none questioned or even noticed if locally produced products are more expensive. Reasoning about price when it comes to organic products is more or less common among food consumers, but reasoning about price when it comes to locally produced appears to be uncommon. Informants had a more critical attitude towards ecological, they have arguments for buying or not buying. They have rational explanations (often the price) for why they do not buy. Organic is loaded in a different way, more rational, than local and Swedish origin, which is more emotional.

In the previous examples, on how the actor Origin performs, it appears as if the other factors that influence consumer choices in food stores are self-contained categories separate from the actor Origin. I want to stress that the actor Origin never works alone in the store, because it is fluid (de Laet & Mol, 2002). Origin always cooperates with the other store (f)actors, such as ecological, the taste, the shape, fair trade, the price, ... The actor Origin is no self-centred actor, but rather a friend. In the picture, for example, it shows that the ecological Swedish mushrooms (below) are more attractive to the consumer than the ecological mushrooms from Latvia (above). Not only are the popular mushrooms from a Swedish origin, they are additionally labelled with *KRAV* and they look more fresh and white than the other mushrooms. Of course it might be that the Swedish mushrooms (below) have been laying there for two days and that



Figure 4. Mushrooms Hemköp, shop-along interview

the tray with mushrooms from Latvia (above) has been changed twice already, but this does not make my argument any less valid. It is still clear that the actor Origin cooperates with other (f)actors and subsequently even becomes them.

In the study it appeared that Origin is not always active, on the contrary, quite often it appeared as a dormant actor. Directly asking consumers about the importance of origin on products resulted in a “I do not care” from time to time. As opposed to other consumers where the presence of the actor actually ensured a noticeable awareness of food origin. Although consumers might say they find the origin of food negligible, much points to that the actor is still active and therefore dormant. It is expected that origin is present, thus consumers do expect it to be available. Even though some consumers did not give origin any implicit meaning when asked of them directly, the absence of Origin would make consumers feel anxious and sceptic. Josef was a respondent who first told me that the foremost thing about the food he buys is that it should be cheap. Later on he says that he only trusts *KRAV*. At the end of our interview he contradicts himself again by saying “I choose Swedish products above others. I prefer Swedish first” (interview, Josef). It is clear that Origin might not always have an immediate influence on its surroundings, but it is extant. This clearly ties back to Mol (1999) who promotes to look at reality itself as multiple, for there are various versions of how Origin is enacted.

Now let us return to dormancy and the application of its aforementioned description in the theoretical chapter. It states that dormancy is a mechanism used by Origin to avoid stressful environmental conditions, during which the actor conserves the amount of energy available to it and makes few demands on its environment. I argue that when the environment around Origin is a stressful one the actor withdraws itself and becomes difficult to attend to. Consumers that shop as stressful actors and bear stressful moods risk to overlook origin. These consumers will often act on routine. For instance, Josef says whenever he needs to be fast “I just pick familiar products without thinking too much” (interview, Josef). Food origin then moves to the background and no longer plays an active role in the consumers decision making.

But what does Josef mean with “I just pick familiar products”? Standing at the cash register in the store Josef notices that he forgot to buy something, but he cannot recall what exactly. “We can take a look at my mobile list” he says. He shows me a list of different food products and tells me “I always bear this with me and I usually take a peek at it if I do not know what I should buy or if I suspect I have forgotten something” (shop-along interview, Josef). There are many food products on the list and several of them I recognize from the goods in his current shopping cart. Even though it appeared that Josef was sensitive to product exposures in

the store and visual advertisements, having a standard list implies that the consumer consequently shops identical and familiar goods. Despite the enormous amount of different sorts of food products, as consumers “we are often quite conservative in our food consumption. New opportunities comes with new dangers” (Burstedt et al., p. 9, 2006). Thus the environment around actor Origin does not need to be a stressful one for Origin to act as dormant. When consumers shop on routine it is simply harder for actor Origin to step forward and do its job.

Beware though, the store environment is peppered with routine shopping. If routine shopping would dominate the actor, it would only be a weak actor. Luckily for us actor Origin is never in a state of rest. When Lars was standing at the dairy department in the food store he picked two packages of Halloumi. He did not hesitate nor look at the other packages of halloumi available. As this illustration indicates, Lars acted and shopped on routine. Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren (2009) tell us that most routines are usually performed without second thought and the moment of conscious choice is diminished. For most people routines are linked to order, predictability and control. In this case, the routine can be seen as an economizing device that helps to avoid making a myriad of choices or reflect about alternatives in recurring situations, something that otherwise may drive us crazy. Ehn and Löfgren describe that if you stop people and ask why they perform their mundane task, they are ready to answer you in detail. Subsequently, I asked Lars why he picked those two packages of halloumi. He responded: “I always take the halloumi from the brand *Larsa*, it is simply the best one. I have tried the other ones, but they are not as good. *Larsa* is real halloumi” (interview, Lars) So what is real halloumi? In this example, real hints at the origin of the halloumi and origin appears to have a strong loaded meaning for Lars. The starting point of the routine is an emotionally charged habit. The real halloumi points to the genuine origin of the product which has an emotional significance for Lars. Routines have polarities and one polarity is that it takes the degree of conscious reflection as a starting point (Ehn & Löfgren, 2009). Ehn and Löfgren (2009) argue that “there is a continuum from mechanical – reflex-like – routines over to emotionally charged habits” (p. 101). In this example Origin has become such a strong actor that it navigates and persuades the consumer into buying the product. And in addition it goes even further by becoming the routine’s incentive or the routine’s starting point. The actor is a dominating actor here and the routine works as a ‘supportive corset’ for the consumer. Routines and food origin work as a comforting and helpful supportive structure that offers security and predictability in the store (Ehn & Löfgren, 2009). But why do consumers crave security and predictability in the store and why is it so highly valued when choosing food? This brings us to the next section; trust and control.

4.2 Trust and control

The usefulness of Origin lies partly in its ability to help consumers in their choice making. Food origin is a product attribute that can act in a supportive way. As we have seen in the previous section, this implies that origin entails a degree of security and predictability in the consumers perception. It thus appears that Origin creates trust with the consumers and gives the consumers a feeling of being in control. So how does Origin create trust with the consumers and how does it give the consumers a feeling of being in control? Why is trust and control so highly valued in food stores?

Trust as a phenomenon is dependent on many factors. Trust is never developed in isolation. Rather, trust is built up together with others in a mutual framework of trust assumptions (Harper, 2014, p. 23). Trust is also dependent on identity, to trust someone or something there must be a clear view on who or what is to be trusted. One important part in the process of trust is thus to getting to know one another, something which is tied to an important part of identity, namely continuity. An assurance that the person, institution or phenomenon is the same today as it will be tomorrow (Harper, 2014, p. 22). From continuity builds reputation, and from reputation trust can arise.

Trusting someone or something means to expect a person or a thing to act in a way that does not counteract interests to the extent that discourages people to cooperate with that person or thing (Harper, 2014, p. 121). Trust is built on experiences, as an embedded trust. These experiences are formed together with others, where shared frameworks of trust assumptions are being built up (Harper, 2014, p. 23). Social context thus helps when making decisions about the degree of trust assigned to specific situations.

With the knowledge that consumers have a hard time to understand what food is good to eat and what food is not good to eat it is interesting to reflect on issues of trust. How do consumers relate to certain information? What information do they trust? In the case of Origin it is not the sole sender of its message but it is controlled, and edited by business partners, as well as other intermediaries, such as the regulators and the creators of food origin. They dictate the content and are part of the performance of different practical versions of origin. Depending on how consumers interact with origin and how much approval and praise or disapproval and dislike origin gets the more visible and prominent the actor might become. The interaction surrounding trust and origin, both in and outside the store, is built up on social actors. As consumers we are faced with signs and messages to decipher and give meaning to. "Actor-network theory is a

disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods for analysis” (Law, 2007, p. 2), therefore utilizing the theory serves as a perfectly suiting method to make sense of all this information, according to the actor-network theory everything around us is generated of webs of relations. As Law (2007) discusses, nothing has reality outside the enactment of those relations, making sense of the world and of information is an ongoing process of translation. But when one translation fails, the web of reality unravels. Translations are thus a process of insecurity and the failure is always close at hand. Together all actors create the consumers experience of food origin independent of their human or non-human nature.

In the case of origin, its success or failure, how it performs as a phenomenon is dependent on a relational web building up and surrounding origin. Now looking at the reality surrounding the consumer’s perception of origin, there seems to be a great deal of confidence in Swedish origin. Almost everyone said that a product with a Swedish origin is more credible than products from other countries. A product with a Swedish origin is also experienced as the most credible label in food stores compared to other more complex labels such as ecological or KRAV; “I buy Swedish because it is just that” (shop-along interview, respondent 14). A Swedish product is a Swedish product and it does not have to be more difficult than that. As for Einar, locally produced means that it is produced in Sweden, and shopping Swedish origin for him “is about safety in terms of legislation and the more general feeling that one cares about nature” (interview, Einar).

Observing these relational examples of origin and trust, it is the configuration of the web that creates durability and stability (Law, 2007). The stability and durability give a ground for the continuity that is required if trust is to arise. All together these relational webs create experiences and frameworks that allow us to trust certain information. But do consumers trust different food labels? Primarily it seems to be the ecological label that provides dubious thoughts with consumers. Hanna and Marcus made clear that they prefer to buy vegetables from the square for “it is there the real organic farmers are” (interview, Marcus). Marcus told me that he had talked to a farmer about the production of ecological food. After the talk he became convinced that “many requirements behind being ecologically certified are bullshit. Just as long they do not DDT bombard the vegetables to kill all the insects” (interview, Marcus). At the square they can buy vegetables that are not wrapped in plastic, something they experience as common with organic vegetables in the conventional food stores. Not only Marcus and Hanna, but several other informants pointed out the paradox of the organic vegetables being wrapped in plastic while the predominant grown vegetables are not.

Respondent Einar refers to back in the days, when he travelled around with his family in Sweden:

When mom and dad pointed at a farm and said this is a KRAV-farmer, then I always thought to myself that those actors surely were having a good time. One just has the illusion that a KRAV-farmer cares more. Now I know that it is all business and they safely invest in what is economically profitable. But still, one will always think KRAV is more sympathetic (interview, Einar).

What Einar expresses is a common emotional appearance; when you do not really know something, you let emotional imaginations guide your understanding. It is more about a feeling than about facts. It is interesting to compare emotional imaginations of the organic with local origin. Although it is difficult to capture the consumer's imagination and to make any solid statements, in the study it appeared that emotional appearances surrounding local origin always had a positive connotation. If we thus are to include the emotional imagination as an actor, it appears the relation between local origin and the actor imagination always is a positive one. Their relation is strong and works much in favour of the actor. I claim therefore that the relation between the organic and the imagination also is a positive one, but as previously shown, less strong and less in favour compared to local origin. An example of a positive imagination of local origin is when Johan describes how much he likes to cultivate himself:

It is the best thing there is. When you see those small plants grow up and then you can harvest vegetables and beans which have become so perfectly ripe. Then I would like to take plenty of time and then cook the food with those ingredients and then eat them with full attendance. Sharing this with friends or family is absolutely wonderful (interview, Johan).

The emotional imagination of Johan is part of his embodied knowledge. As Pink (2009) tells us, understanding the embodiment helps in understanding how other people experience, remember and imagine. For this Pink falls back on Downey's explanation that embodied knowledge is not simply stored information but that it involves biological processes. In understanding embodiment Downey brings to the fore the idea of embodiment as a process that is integral to the relationship between humans and their environments (Pink, 2009). Thus the consumer's way of thinking changes according to the environment and bodily experience. In

like manner, Nadia Seremetakis (1994) explains how the senses are implicated in historical interpretation as witnesses or record-keepers of material experience, but also how objects bear within them emotional and historical sedimentation that can provoke and ignite gestures, discourses and acts. Acts which can open up objects' stratigraphy. The stratigraphy of food labels or product packaging for example can open up such memories or connotations people personally have to origin.

Anna said she believes in labels, but at the same time she claims that companies create different labels all the time just to sell something. What she likes more and more are such products that have a story with it:

This product has been made from this farmer and we have paid him so much ... I trust it, it feels genuine and they do not try to hide anything, it becomes very transparent this way. It is often a small business or organization that does this, so I see no reason for lying (interview, Anna).

Informant Lars had a lot of confidence in retailer Coop's own ecological label *Änglamark*. In the store Lars was looking for corn starch and flour. He seemed to be unfamiliar with that section of the store and did not know what product to take. He observed two different packages first, but then he saw both corn starch and flour from the label *Änglamark* and put the products in his cart. Lars told me he has "great trust in *Änglamark*" (interview, Lars). The label clearly allows Lars to make easy decisions whenever he is unsure about what sort of product to choose, it works as a safety net on which he can fall back. For Lars the label worked as an indicator towards good to eat food. As Cecilia Fredriksson put it: "the meaning of a label can thus be interpreted as an important demarcation between natural/clean and unnatural/unclean" (Fredriksson, 2000, p. 165). For consumers labels have an important function even though they might be sceptic and not always trust the label. In the fast changing modern food system new technologies and new representations make these demarcations fluid and create uncertainty with the consumer, the boundaries of what is perceived as natural and cultural shift. A label can therefore work as a tool to bring trust and stability to the consumers in food stores. In case of the actor, even though actor Origin is fluid, when it performs through a label of origin it tries to be solid and guarantee stability and trust. Fredriksson (2000) states that: "The meeting between food and human beings requires a cultural action program, a ritual that guarantees confidence and the establishment of new demarcations" (p. 165). An interesting scenario is when origin comes to stand in relation to GMO foods. Fredriksson clarifies the difficulty of

creating trust in GMO foods, especially when comparing it to foods from an authentic origin. The latter are foods that have been transported over geographical borders and where the originating food region symbolizes authenticity and genuine products. In this case “key words like origin and nature become important ingredients in the marketing of food in an EU context” (Salomonsson, in Fredriksson, 2000, p. 166). Actor Origin’s working power is essential for incorporating food into its own culture and is thus a vital actor for incorporating GMO foods. But note that the strength of actor Origin, as Law (2007) discusses, is not real until it is enacted into being. Trust surrounding food origin is not real until it is enacted into being. As Law points out this highlights the importance of performativity. It is not only that the relational web building up around origin constructs the social. Rather it is the enactment and the enactment into being that makes it real and decides if we for example can trust GMO foods. It is not that the actor Origin in itself is seen as inheriting power. Rather, it is the fact of it as a subject with the following potential to act that gives it power. Without the surrounding relational web the actor is thus just an isolated subject (Law, 2007).

For all that, it is evident that a label is not omnipotent, it cannot constantly perform to incorporate different sorts of food into the consumer culture. If incorporating foods is its primary objective, it does fail occasionally. For it is there to inform and not to dominate. How trust appears in labels is totally dependent on the relational webs surrounding them. These webs surrounding food are known as fragile and precarious and can easily lead up to controversies. But how do these controversies come into being and who inspires us and affects us as food consumers? An exemplifying issue that came up twice in the study was the controversy surrounding ecologically labelled eggs. Linda, 45 years old, said she buys many ecological products “especially dairy products, I did buy eggs as well before, but they say it is not good, so I do not buy them anymore... It has something to do with fish flour they put in it” (shop-along interview, respondent 5). Similarly Vana, 36 years old, said she buys ecological eggs but she heard they smell like fish: “my friends think ecological eggs smell like fish or something like that, I do not know really, but I still buy them” (shop-along interview, respondent 4). Cross-checking with a Swedish newspaper article from *Expressen* the 15th of April 2017, it alarms for the high toxin level in ecological eggs:

Livsmedelsverket arbetar med att hitta källan till den höga gifthalten i ekologiska ägg. I en rapport som publicerades i höstas framkom det att ekologiska ägg innehåller förhöjda halter av gifterna dioxin och PCB, skriver Sydsvenskan. Ekoäggen innehåller

ungefär tre gånger mer gift än de vanliga äggen. Orsaken är fortfarande oklar, men Livsmedelsverket misstänker att gifterna kommer från hönsfodret (Yoldas, 2017).

(The Swedish National Food Administration is investigating the source of the high toxicity level in organic eggs. A report published last autumn revealed that organic eggs contain increased levels of dioxin and PCB poisoning, writes *Sydsvenskan*. The egg yolk contains about three times more poison than common eggs. The reason is still unclear, but the Swedish Food Administration suspects that the toxicities derive from the chicken food) (Yoldas, 2017).

It is apparent that *Expressen* was not the only newspaper that wrote about this issue, also other newspapers repeatedly reported about the topic. Therefore I assorted this more recent article to work as an elaborative tool for this part of the analysis, because, as Hastrup (2015) shows us, reality is located in the historical, the material and the cultural. In the above illustrated citation it appears to be unclear what exactly causes the high toxin level in ecological eggs, but there is suspicion it derives from the chicken nourishment. Further down in the article it states that those who produce organic eggs must mix fish flour in the chicken food so that the hens receive an important protein. The reference to fish flour can explain why both respondents referred to the presence of fish in relation to ecological eggs and why Vana even spoke of a distinguished fish smell. Media influences us as consumers, stories and rumors arise easily from it. Stories can start to lead a life on its own and stories become fictions, for consumers are vulnerable for cultural imaginaries when it concerns their food. The preceding demonstrates once again the vulnerable perception of the organic and how the organic is more easily linked to negative consumer imaginaries than origin is.

Notable is that both Linda and Vana imply to have received their information from other consumers and not the media. Linda mentions “they say” as if her information is common knowledge with consumers and Vana refers to her friends being the direct source of the rumor. This is not weird since we live in, what Anthony Giddens (Beck, Lash & Giddens, 1994) would term as, a recommendation society. The latter means that we are turning to those we trust in our own networks when making a decision. Giddens emphasis the fact that active trust is needed in today’s society in order to form social solidarity and personal ties. Social media channels enable us to get recommendations or can inspire us exactly in the moment we are in need of inspiration, perhaps just at the moment when we will make a purchase decision in a store. If you as a consumer are somewhat cynical or critical towards other media, logically you

will be even more influenced by what is written in the social media flow of your own friends and acquaintances.

A majority of those I interviewed and followed in this study say they trust other's - friends, acquaintances, influencers - experiences, thus, how they experience a product and also origin. This is telling for how we function as consumers which is clearly amplified in the digital world we live in today. Giddens points out how social relations today can be lifted out from the local and site-bound to reconnect in other spaces and times. However, this does not mean that social relations are about to fade away, rather that there is something in consumer goods that binds people together, also over large distances (Giddens, in Jönsson, 2005, p. 160). This is why we listen to others' experiences of a product, a good, a brand. Instead of having to buy the product, use the product, think about the product and judge the product before you can start feeling trust, we can be influenced by what our friends or influencers think.

For more traditional advertisement it showed to be credible and interesting when it was found in specialized media. Hanna, who has a magazine for vegetarians (*Vegourmet*) said: "here I feel, if I see an advertisement here 'oh interesting, this could have been exciting'" (interview, Hanna). Lars finds that the Coop store advertisement, where the program leader from *Historieätarna* Lotta Lundgren participates, is credible: "She is a very calm and trustworthy person" (interview, Lars). Another appearance was the consumer demand for knowledgeable retailers, or at least the opportunity to get digital tips at the store. The demand for someone who can be trusted, advise or tell the consumer more than what can easily be found on *Google*. This demand can be seen as another indication towards the disconnect or the distance that people experience in their understanding of and relationship to food. Knowledgeable retailers function in a same manner as the actor does, in that they both convey a sense of security that aims at counteracting the feeling of a distant and modernized food industry, especially when it comes to foods that are perceived as foreign.

Most of the informants, however, felt inundated by all the information that flows through so many different platforms. Therefore, many get tired of all these necessary translations of information. Instead the consumers I met chose to ignore various forms of advice. It would simply be too hard and too time consuming to get to know everything that is written. Not only is there a very large selection of, basically, all products, there are a lot of labels that urge the consumer to be environmentally conscious, ethically and politically correct, kind to the local farmer, economic, and ... it is just too much to take in. Companies tend to overwhelm consumers with information, outsourcing the decision-making to them with little help to guide them.

Actor Origin participates in these information flows, it is one actor in the large web of many different actors that make up our reality (Mol, 1999). It is the consumer's choice to attend to origin and not the other way around. For the actor is, as discussed above, fluid and thus adaptable (de Laet & Mol, 2002). In this case the actor seems somewhat powerless or subordinate to the consumer. For actor Origin to be powerful it does not necessarily need to convey lots of information, but it needs to succeed in generating a specific feeling with the consumer. Namely convey the feeling of them being in control, because only then trust can arise. Establishing trust and control with the consumer appears to be the key to success in food stores. But why are these two players so highly valued in this consumer life and probably the next? Why do consumers want to be in control of their food? Why are several informants, and especially Håkan, so obsessed with opting out processed foods? The constant argumentation for opting out processed foods resonated; "because of the additives". On an individual level, people are concerned about their health. By eating you let the outside world into your body in order to literally change your body's composition. People want to eat food they can trust, good to eat food which increasingly means healthy food. People want to eat food from somewhere, instead of food from nowhere. Food stands in direct relation to health, thus health stands in direct relation to food origin. Which brings us to the next section of this chapter, healthism.

4.3 Healthism

"A mortadella from *Ridderheims*, maybe the cat can have it. It may sound a bit snobbish, but it really means something where the food comes from. Quality to me, are fresh good ingredients, preferably from nearby". Lars thinks and then says: "I love Italy and I think Italian ingredients are better. There is no one in Sweden who can air-dry a ham so that it tastes as good as Parma ham. I have tried everything, it is not possible" (interview, Lars).

What can we learn from this example? The actor tells us that once origin is installed by the regulators and the creators, only when it is properly installed and transmitted to the consumer, can it begin to provide trust. But once this has been done it does not simply supply trust but something even better: it becomes a reference to pure, authentic and clean food. And so actor Origin turns out to be a tool that can guarantee not just trust and control but also health, quality and purity. It becomes a reference to the source of pure, fresh, clean food. The actor Origin tells the consumer what is right food, good to eat food, quality food. But, does right food also give the consumer a greater feeling of satisfaction?

Hanna and Marcus experience more expensive food as better. According to them, it is the price that determines the quality of the food, but it is more about not buying the cheapest brands than choosing the most expensive ones. For Einar and Håkan, it is the time to prepare the food in combination with knowledge of where the food originates from which gives them an increased sense of right. Anna and Johan enjoy food more that they have harvested themselves. Johan told me about his magical stew: “at the autumn feast I made a stew for twenty people and everything was from the farm, a reaped stew that became absolutely magical. These were big amounts, but it is about your presence and how you put yourself into it... I think it is a completely different feeling to eat something that has been harvested just before, that is a big difference” (interview, Johan). While for Anna it is more about transparency: “It is close and I know how it is, produced in a good way, it does not harm nature or any person” (interview, Anna).

It is significant to see how actor Origin repeatedly comes out to play in these examples of right food. Clearly, depending on how an individual defines what is good to eat or not, consumption of right food gives a greater sense of satisfaction. In addition, different types of food provide the consumer with different status or maybe I should say different taste. Burstedt et al. (2006) tell us how taste has a multifaceted meaning. Taste is something you can receive: the mortadella had a good taste. It's something you can do: I actively taste something. Lastly it is something you can have: the person has a good taste. When talking about food some of these taste dimensions are tied together (Burstedt et al., 2006). Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has shown us how telling taste is and how it helps in the creation and maintenance of various hierarchical social relations. Different types of food become a reflection of the self and the individual's value is related to how well you take care of yourself. So right food is also about how you think you are perceived by others depending on the food you eat. For several people I studied in this study, what and how they eat was depending on whether it was an everyday context, with the family or more of a festive occasion. A good example was Hanna who was going to have guests over the next day and had decided on making some spring rolls. She had found a recipe, in the magazine *Vegourmet*, which asked for rice vinegar. In the store with Hanna there was only one bottle of rice vinegar to choose from. She took the bottle, but then said explicitly to me she would have picked that other bottle if it would have been rice vinegar. She points to another bottle: “that one is much nicer, this is not so nice. That one is what would be standing on my table when people are visiting” (interview, Hanna). Having that bottle on the table as a display means the food is more than just food for Hanna, it becomes a status symbol. It says something about her taste and how she wants to be perceived by others. Buying

the right food is thus not only about the freshness or quality of certain food. Right food is also a way to express who you are. For the consumer these often go hand in hand, right food as both quality food and as an expression of who you are. Similarly, other consumer goods have a significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value. The goods have become an important way through which consumers shape their identity. Their significance rests largely in their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning (McCracken, 1986).

So how does the actor take advantage of this situation? In order to understand what role actor Origin plays in all this we need to take a deeper look first at the relation between right food and the consumer's identity. Reflecting on food's nature, among other things food's origin, is a way for the consumer to take power over both the body and culture (Lupton, 1998). Responsibility for your health and a good taste have become an important part of the consumer's cultural identity. Burststedt et al. (2006) point out that today's food consumption is characterized by constant tensions between body and environment, control and experience, the self and the group. Indeed very noticeable in this study, and in today's society, was the great deal of focus on and interest in health and physical activity. Giddens (1991) has discussed how the individual today is occupied with renegotiating its identity and body. This culture of the body can thus be seen as a reflection of the emerging individualization. The body is a major part of the modern human identity project in a consumer society where the body's surface may seem more important than the inside. The body has simply become an individual project. In times when we do not have to worry about finding food for the day or surviving a war, we can focus on ourselves instead. Robert Crawford (1980) describes how the preoccupation with health took on an even bigger role during the increasing affluence in the Western world. He argues that during the 1970's many people started to become preoccupied with personal health as a primary - often the primary - focus for the definition and achievement of well-being. Meghan Cridland (2017) clarifies in the chapter *Healthism* in her doctoral dissertation that healthism should be seen as an umbrella term for a certain view on body, health, and eating that can be lived out in many ways and with many different diets. In it she emphasizes the importance of how the term healthism puts its focus on the individual rather than collective health. A good example of how healthism, individualization and the body are intertwined is when Johan describes his morning smoothie routine which he has been doing now for nearly two years:

Well, I started doing it a while ago when I felt I was burning out myself at work and so on. So I took a step back and took the decision that I would calm down, eat more healthy, go to yoga, take care of myself (interview, Johan).

Britta Pelters and Barbro Wijma (2016) believe that today's health craze meets all criteria for it to be called a religion. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of full physical, mental and social well-being" (p. 132). According to Pelters and Wijma, this definition can be seen as a divine principle. Through health, people get control of something in their lives, namely their own body and their own well-being. It gives people a similar sense of security as believing in a divine power. But this sense of control can easily turn into a feeling of disappointment, perhaps even shame, when you cannot maintain control over your health by movement or food. Healthism is, therefore, today's religion where concepts such as sin, punishment and reconciliation are included. Before in Western societies one sinned to god, now we sin to a health god. Pelters and Wijma point out that healthism makes it easy to condemn people who eat wrong, do not exercise, smoke or in any way oppose their health. People divide foods into right or wrong food. An example of wrong food was, as previously mentioned, processed foods. The latter clearly had to be avoided: "there is so much weird processed vegetarian food. Reducing the meat eating in our family was not particularly difficult, but the hard part was to also think about your own health" (interview, Håkan).

According to a report from the McKinsey Global Institute (2014), 2.1 billion people in the world were overweight in 2014. By 2030, half of humanity is estimated to be overweight. This means we will not see the forces surrounding this health religion diminish, but rather the opposite, it will grow. As Pelters and Wijma (2016) put it: "the values of the Western health religion define good citizenship and point unambiguously towards issues of class and alienation in corresponding societies" (p. 137). It will thus become a more visible issue of social class and distinctions; the ones who have control over their bodies, what one eats and how one moves oneself, those ones are morally to be better people.

Health religion pre-eminently affects food consumers. All the customers I spoke to in the stores said not to buy muesli because of the amounts of sugar in it. Instead many claimed to make their own muesli so to have control of the ingredients. This is just an indication of how we as food consumers are affected by healthism and how we want to depict ourselves as conscious and healthy individuals. Especially, note the influence of me as a researcher, when a researcher is standing in front of you and posing questions about your food habits. Even though the consumers might have been affected by my presence, their answers still express

how they want to be seen, which is as healthy consumers. It is clear how health has seaped into most people's consciousness and everyone I talked to in this study said they wanted to have healthy products. Of course it is one thing to be influenced by how you want to be portrayed and it is another thing to actually put those products in your shopping cart. It is for example hard to believe, that everyone who told me they make their own muesli because it is more healthy, actually does it. What can be said with more certainty though is that the focus on health and thus control on the foodstuffs you bodily incorporate will increase.

All of this paints health and the consumer's identity in a different light. But what does this in the end mean for the actor Origin? Does it succeed in taking advantage of the situation? It is difficult to say how much actor Origin steers and influences the consumers identity exactly, but they have a relation and it is certainly a positive one. Choosing right food - right food is usually synonymous with healthy food - enhances people's sense of well-being at a time when health is not a trend but a religion. The actor tells the consumer what is right food and it often refers to the source of pure, fresh, clean food. It thus appears the actor Origin is increasingly winning control over the consumer.

5. The Origin Experience

Origin is multiple, it performs in different ways (Mol, 1999). Origin is dependent on the sort of food, but also dependent on the kind of origin. Origin is a relational actor and it becomes clear that the reality of the consumer's perception of origin is multiple. As previously mentioned, Origin is not only fluid in performance but also in nature. There are different kinds of origin; such as local origin, Swedish origin, EU-origin. Of particular interest to the following chapter is Swedish origin. In the coming chapter I will examine two sections that investigate the consumer's perception of Swedish origin in relation to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). How does the fluid actor Origin work as a Swedish marketing tool? In the first section, 5.1 Swedishness, I examine what happens with the consumer perception of food origin when the actor Origin takes the form of Swedish origin. In other words, what meaning does Swedish origin bear for the consumer? In the second section, 5.2 The experienced consumer, I investigate what happens to the actor Origin when consumers become aware that the actor Origin works closely with companies as a marketing tool.

5.1 Swedishness

Sunday afternoon, early March, Coop Stadion, Malmö. It was not the first time I entered the big retail store located next to the city's sports arena. I had previously been in the store with one of my informants. I happened to be in the neighbourhood, I was a bit bored and had then decided to head to the store. I did not really know why I was heading there since I was not in need of any food, I was just eager to revisit the place. Gladly entering the Coop store to escape the cold, I felt a glow when opening the door. It was not just the warm temperature of the place, but it was also the chatter and jazzy music that hit me when going in. I then remembered why I liked the store so much, the harmonious combination of these sounds created a certain atmosphere in the store and made me feel relaxed. The first thing I did was to take a basket and go through the automatic barriers. Going through those made me feel as if I had officially entered the store, the actual shopping experience had started. Food stores often make visitors follow a certain route through the shop. The routes are organized according a linear trail, but are not confined. It aims to lead visitors quickly to generate time and space for other visitors to experience the store and its products. This Coop store was big, there was a lot to choose from and also to look at. They had a meat, a fish a cheese counter and a bakery. I was strolling through the shop and looking around. I had no intention of buying anything but I stopped between the cheese and meat department. All products were in aisles of fridges behind glass cases. In analogy with a museum, the glass cases created a certain analytical look towards the products. Before choosing any products you observe and analyse the products. The main difference though lies in that the glass cases in stores also create a hygienic connotation. I was staring at different sausages – *leverkorv*, *Falukorv*, *Onsalakorv* - all packed in plastic and I noticed there was a little label next to it. The label is a well-known label in Sweden. The label is even about Sweden and it can be found in many different Swedish food stores. The label said: “Titta efter market: Kött från Sverige. Lätt att välja svenskt. Odlat, fött och uppfött, förädlad och förpackat i Sverige (*Look for the label: Meat from Sweden. It is easy to choose Swedish. Grown and bred, processed and packaged in Sweden*)”. It was one of those labels of Swedish origin created by the organisation *Från Sverige*. Their labels respond to the Swedish national colours yellow and blue. The Swedish label evoked a feeling of safety and trust with me. It was there to play on my senses and emotions, it said this is fresh Swedish meat but it also said more than just that.



Figure 5. Label Från Sverige, kött från Sverige

For this store visit description I draw upon sensory ethnography, since the material reality of this food store is approached by me and the centrality of my experiences (Pink, 2009). The reason why I bring up this description is because I firstly want to point out that “food companies work hard today to create fresh logos, design packaging and think about the right marketing strategy, all in order to back up an experience in the brand and products” (O’Dell, 2002, p. 64). The store visit to me was a pleasant experience and attracted me to revisit the store, but also the products on sale were trying to respond to me and give me some sort of experience. Secondly, I want to show how the Swedish origin label worked on me and evoked something within me. It made me mentally travel and think that the Swedish meat is more safe and genuine than other meat. Jönsson explains that giving consumers the opportunity to recreate experiences, to travel in time and space, is perhaps the most important property food has in the experience economy (O’Dell, 2002).

So if the actor Origin performs in a Swedish form does it then convince consumers that Swedish food is more genuine? The answer to that question is yes. Based on what the informants said, Swedish origin is more authentic than food from other countries, this applies especially for all meat products. Although if the food product has a clear country of origin, Swedish is not necessarily the most genuine. According to Josef, pasta is an Italian product, therefore he wants to buy Italian pasta. He would not buy *Kungsörrens* pasta for example. In the store the 35 year-old Johan had a majority of Swedish food products in his shopping cart. He told me: “I usually buy Swedish, except the salami. That has to be Italian” (shop-along interview, respondent 1). Also Lars talked about the importance of the genuine origin of certain products, like mortadella and salami. In stores he often does not find Italian products: “most of the products come from *Ridderheim*’s or some other Swedish food brand that tastes crap” (interview, Lars).

It is thus clear that Swedish is perceived to be more genuine when it comes to products originating from Sweden, such as meat or vegetables or when the consumer is uncertain about a product. Actor Origin, in a Swedish form, provides a sense of security and control. But if the product has a strong connection with another country, it appears that Swedish Origin often is not strong enough to compete with those other forms of actor Origin. Thus, it is not Swedish in its own right that provides quality – but it is the actor Origin on a general level that provides quality. In other words, it is the food’s connection to its origin that stands for quality.

The actor Origin is multiple, but when talking about actor Origin it is interesting to learn how Swedish Origin performs and affects the consumer and how Swedish Origin relates to actor

Origin performing locally (Mol, 1999). As mentioned almost all informants responded to the fact that Swedish food is more credible compared with other foods. But what is this all about? Is it an expression of nationalism, a need for control or an expression of the Swedish safety culture? Because when discussing deeper with the informants, it appears that shopping products that have a specific country of origin, such as Parma ham, one would rather buy a brand from that country because it is perceived to be the most genuine. If a product does not have a genuine country of origin, such as Parma ham for example, it gets another meaning in Swedish. A recurring appearance was the uplifting of Swedish meat and the rejection of Danish meat among the questioned consumers. Pär, 43 years old, only looks at the origin of a product when it is milk or meat, but not when it is bread or crispbread: “when it comes to meat, Danish is not good” (shop-along interview, respondent 6). Martin, 47 years old, took Swedish eggs in the store and told me: “it is important when there is animal husbandry involved that it is Swedish. It is more ethical and to support your own businesses. I do not want Danish meat” (shop-along interview, respondent 9). Bodil, 73 years old, looks at the product origin and tries to buy Swedish when it comes to meat:

Swedish meat is what I want, it is better. Danish meat may be cheaper, but there is more water in it. So then I do not mind paying a little more. In the case of other products, I do not think origin is so important. Apart from pasta maybe. I always buy Italian, it tastes better (shop-along interview, respondent 10).

These examples tell us two things: first, the Swedish actor Origin works well when it stands in connection with animal or dairy products. The connection between Swedish origin and vegetables and fruits were also repeatable mentioned by respondents and appeared to be strong. Do these foods then have something in common? These foodstuffs are known to be sensitive with consumers because they want them to be fresh. The Swedish actor Origin thus works well when the freshness of a food product plays an important role in the consumer’s decision making. That is why food origin appears to be less important for consumers when it comes to “other products” or “crispbread”.¹ Second, it tells us that actor Origin in a Danish form is a weak actor in Sweden when it comes to meat. But why is this? Is meat from Denmark bad? When I talked to Lars about Swedish meat he told me: “the Swedish meat industry has done a really good job in marketing the Swedish meat as better. I honestly do not think Danish meat

¹ Crispbread is a food product that usually has an expiration date longer than a month.

is as bad as often portrayed” (interview, Lars). Is the way Swedish consumers think then an uncommon way of thinking? No, consumers argue in the same way in other countries as well. In a study by Ulf Hjelmar (2011), it was reported that Danish consumers preferred organic food produced in Denmark, mostly because they perceived it as fresher, higher quality and because of stricter regulations in Denmark.

People buy Swedish because it is fresh and also because it guarantees a sense of security and control in the absence of other control and safety guidelines. It seems that we are talking about the same, but what is new to us is that the control can be described as two different things. Partly the underlying feeling that Swedish is controlled and safe (this feeling seems etched in the subconscious of many Swedes, as a type of spinal cord reflex) and partly a sense of security that you can actually contact a company in Sweden, something that feels impossible if it is a multinational company, like Barilla or Nestlé. An illustrative example for these two things is when 71 year old Britt Marie talked about Swedish food origin:

Swedish feels safe, then I have a better view on it all. I have worked a lot in the food industry. I know the Swedish food industry better so I have more control over what I am eating... Swedish food feels more authentic, closer and I am more aware of where it comes from (shop-along interview, respondent 8).

Many respondents, when asked what Swedish is for them, gave similar answers about the nature, welfare, a safety net, something positive or about trust. People thus experience and connect Swedish with positive feelings and imaginations. Einar even said at the end of the interview: “every time I read about Sweden in international media, then I just feel like ‘yes Sweden, we are so damn good’” (interview, Einar).

Companies are well aware of these positive experiences connected to Swedishness and use it to brand their products. As I pointed out in my theoretical framework, origin is imposed on the creators of food origin but it works two ways. The creating actors are food producers that can employ origin as a productive tool for market forces while then simultaneously speaking to the intimate, sensory apprehension of and semiotic significance given to being in location. These creators of origin are embedded in the experience economy and use the actor as a productive tool to stage experiences (O’Dell, 2002). Jönsson says that “the Swedish food industry operators today put down considerable resources on creating and launching so-called value added products” (O’Dell, 2002, p. 63). The strategy to create an experience around a brand is not something new in itself, but what is new is the apparent strength of the actor when

it takes on a Swedish form. The Swedish actor Origin appears to be strong and convinces many consumers in a positive way.

An additional reason why Swedish origin has such a positive resonance with consumers is because the food is connected to proximity. Therefore I want to pose the question; is the Swedish actor Origin then equal to the local actor Origin? Most often, Swedish goods are similar to local goods, but it depends on what locally produced means for a consumer. For example, some consumers would never buy a locally produced good in a big retail store because it does not rightfully feel like being locally produced. It is not locally produced in the way you think about buying directly from a local farmer. Therefore, there are local markets or farmers markets where there are real locally produced goods. For others it is enough that it is Swedish for it to be perceived as being locally produced. One example is Marcus who says: “Swedish means it is locally produced, so I buy it”. But then he says:

I try not to buy *Arla* because it is too big machinery. I think it is good to support smaller companies when it goes. It feels better. I have this image that large companies cheat more with the rules and there is less feeling in their products in a way. I think *Arla*'s cows do not feel as good as the cows of a farmer who produces for a small society. If I have the time I go to the square nearby, that is where the real organic farmers stand (interview, Marcus).²

This example tells us that actor Origin can work as a concealing actor when obscuring production realities. According to Marcus the local Swedish milk feels better than the *Arla* milk. His emotional response is an obscuring mechanism evoked by the actor Origin. Instead of rationally exploring what the best milk is in relation to animal welfare, Marcus has an intuitive association that *Arla* is a big company which then means unhappy cows for him. The actor Origin, in this case, is obscuring the relation between food production and the consumer. This is not only the case for Marcus, but this has also been the case with other examples I have given about emotional reactions consumers have to food origin. The actor Origin can obscure production realities, but as I will show in the next section The experienced consumer, the actor can also expose relations.

² Arla Foods is the largest producer of dairy products in Scandinavia. It is an international cooperative formed as the result of a merger between a Swedish cooperative and a Danish dairy company.

Swedish produce has become a synonym for locally produced when consumers shop in regular daily food stores. However, it is probable that the local and small scale produce is perceived as better quality and safe because it is often associated with a cozy farmhouse some miles outside the city. People react immediately to emotional impulses (after that comes the cognitive rational thinking), so locally produced has a head start to several other standardizations. Lars expresses this quite clearly, local production is something positive for him: “This food has not gone so far, which means that it is hopefully fresher, that it has matured on a branch instead of in a box in a car or on a boat” (interview, Lars). What I noticed in this study is that many people put a similarity between the Swedish and the locally produced, or at least equal to. Also many consumers I talked to in the stores were positive about the Swedish, but they also said: “This does not mean I trust ICA or Coop, it is still business... *Från Sverige*, branding food as Swedish, it is marketing” (shop-along interview, respondent 11). “It is still business”, this brings us to the next section of this chapter the experienced consumer. This section is also about consumer experiences, but unlike the first section, which focused on staged experiences as happenings, focus is put on experience as gained knowledge by the consumers. What happens when consumers become experienced about the experience economy? And what happens to the actor when consumers become aware that food origin is a marketing tool which is part of the experience economy?

5.2 The experienced consumer

”They only want to have money, that is what it is all about. Business is business” (interview, Josef). This was an answer I received from Josef after his speech of why he had become so cynical towards business companies. “Business is business” is a well-known and significant expression, and not only in Sweden. At that time I did not take much notice to his utterance of distrust or of him using this common expression. However, in the next few weeks, the phrase kept coming back at me. What makes the expression so strangely powerful and significant? What does it actually mean? Well, it implicates that something is what it is, but in this case there is a negative connotation to it. The latter is clearly illustrated by my informant’s previous said sentence and discourse, in other words business is conceived as negative. It is to state or in a way warn someone to not be disappointed, because in the end it is always about money. In many of the interviews a general distrust was present against (food) businesses. The quote illustrates what most of my informants expressed, but in different ways. All expressing and exposing doubts, concerns or distrust towards the global economic system. So how is business always business? Why is it a well-known expression and where does this implication come

from, that it is always about money? To answer this I felt the need to dig deeper into the aspirations of my informants, for these are matters of concern immanent in our society. What do the choices and answers of my informants tell us about how people consume? And how does the actor Origin deal with this situation?

Historian Yuval Noah Harari (2016) claims in his book *Homo Deus: A brief history of tomorrow* that the belief in linear economic growth and the free-market capitalism has crossed the border from the land of science into that of religion. From its belief in the supreme value of growth, capitalism deduces its number one commandment: “thou shalt invest thy profits in increasing growth” (p. 245). Economic growth has thus become the crucial juncture where almost all modern religions, ideologies and movements meet. Modernity is based on the firm belief that economic growth is not only possible, but absolutely essential. Harari argues that for thousands of years the scientific road to growth was blocked because people believed that holy scriptures and ancient traditions already contained all the important knowledge the world had to offer. A human culture that believed it already knew everything worth knowing would not bother searching for new knowledge. This was the case for most premodern human civilisations. However, the scientific revolution freed humankind from this naïve conviction. Once humans realised how little they knew about the world, they suddenly had a very good reason to seek knowledge, which opened up the scientific road to progress. Whereas today everyone is obsessed with growth, in the premodern era people were oblivious to it (Harari, 2016).

The expression “business is business” is an expression indirectly derived from this (global) cultural belief in the necessity of linear economic growth. As Latour (2010) sees it, the problem with the ongoing climate debate is that nature, as it is constructed in science and politics, is based on the conception that “nature is always already assembled” (p. 482). Here I see parallels with how economic growth is always already assembled, to the manner in which economic growth is so often conceived of as an external whole. The belief in growth is immanent and portrayed as necessary for the future development of the planet. Latour wants us to include nonhumans, for this is what it means to do politics. Nonhuman actors includes nature (not as an external whole, but separate entities), but we have as yet no idea of what it means to govern the world now that nature as an organizing concept (or, rather, conceit) is gone. It is safe to say that most scholars and an increasing number of politicians recognise the reality of global warming and the magnitude of the danger, because the real nemesis of the modern economy is ecological collapse. What it means to do science is to include entangled and controversial and highly disputable matters of concern (Latour, 2010). These matters of

concern were present with all my informants and are immanent and illustrative for today's (global) society. Anna, for example, said she wants to see "a major change in the system". Also she told me she is sceptical towards normal retail stores: "they are so big, they want to make a lot of profit and they do not give a shit about how their products are produced" (interview, Anna).

How do we pursue human wellbeing in the Anthropocene? Enabling every person to lead a life of dignity and opportunity, while safeguarding the integrity of earth's life-supporting systems. The belief in the necessity of linear economic growth creates distrust and does not give us any long term answers. As Harari describes it "capitalism has thus sanctified a voracious and chaotic system that grows by leaps and bounds, without anyone understanding what is happening and whither we are rushing" (p. 255). Resulting anxieties are strongly present and affect different societal facets. Johan has not had any newspapers or tv for many years, which has been a conscious decision: "I do not want the media to affect my worldview. I do not trust the media" (interview, Johan). Informant Lars told me: "journalism is dying, at least how we used to know it... I used to read three newspapers every day, now nothing" (interview, Lars). Also Marcus said: "media has to sell itself and headlines do sell. Telling the truth does not sell any newspapers" (interview, Marcus). "Has to sell itself", it is depicted as a necessity in order to survive on the market.

Would it be wrong of me to state that we are living in a fantasy or a neo-reality? The belief in linear economic growth can be seen as an example of a simulation writ large. Baudrillard (1998) writes how:

consumption is an order of significations, like language or like the kinship system in primitive society... The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods and signs/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 79-80).

According to Baudrillard, "the code" has become dominant to such an extent that we have to question some of the most basic distinctions that have informed social and cultural thinking. Distinctions between culture and reality and between the sign and that which is symbolized no longer make sense. He expresses how, with the postmodernity of late capitalism, "a neo-reality has everywhere been substituted for reality, a neo-reality entirely produced by combining elements of the code" (p. 126). The belief in linear economic growth is real, the profit is real, there are real companies and real jobs. Individually, we are inspired to increase our incomes

and our standards of living. At the same time the engine behind all this is a capitalistic set of beliefs that we have to grow perpetually. As Baudrillard would point out, the real is built upon a myth or fantasy, perpetual linear economic growth, which is an idealized capitalistic fairy tale reflecting generations of thought about how the economy should be like. Although the belief is dominant, the idealized fairy tale is changing with consumers. As Marcus said to me: “I have a picture of the bigger a business is, the more they can cheat with the rules” (interview, Marcus). All my informants distrust the predominant belief and question it. The answers of my informants say something about how they relate towards the world and about their horizon of meanings. The answers reflect consumer values and ontologies, of how things are and what they mean. The replies say something about the world and the global destructive events. In other words, the choices and responses of my informants partly reflect the boundaries of the globalized world in which they live. Einar told to me: “there are many factors which are hard to figure out for a consumer. What is best for the world, what is climate smart? That is why I just stopped eating meat, it was the easiest to do. Then I reduce climate pressure without thinking too much myself” (interview, Einar). The response is a personal choice and action towards global processes. This consumer sees the global in the local and makes this choice because he does not want to think about the global.

This study is a study about food. Nützenadel and Trentmann (2008) point out that food and globalization are inseparable. Food has played a distinctive role in the course of globalization, human societies can manage without money but they cannot go without food. Although my material is local, it is intertwined with the global. As Latour (2010) says about the present cosmos, “micro- and macrocosm are now literally and not simply symbolically connected, and the result is a kakosmos, that is, in polite Greek, a horrible and disgusting mess! And yet a kakosmos is a cosmos nonetheless” (p. 481). One knows that the planet is not doing well and as exemplified by Einar’s answer, this influences consumer choices. Consumers seek to give meaning and react in their own way. Wilk (2001) explains that all forms of consumption are morally ambiguous and problematic, whatever one’s social role or position in the world system. Consuming can be constructive or destructive, coercive or free, a medium of domination or resistance, or both at the same time. These become truly moral issues because there are so many contradictory goods and bads where choices are not clear-cut (Wilk, 2001). Consumption and morality cannot be separated. Among my informants there was an awareness of how consumption affects others: “the food industry cannot become some kind of concentration camp for poor people that have become completely dependent on a company” (interview, Lars). There is a rising awareness, with emergence of global atmospheric change

as a central environmental issue. Wilk (2001) writes that the international debate about consumption and morality has become more explicit in the last thirty years. He suggests that it is more important to attack the regime that drives the destruction, than other critics of that regime, no matter how misguided. Because the overriding issue is an increasingly likely future in which everyone will suffer from the damage done to our planet. This regime is guided by the belief in linear economic growth. It can provide prosperity, but not always well-being. Humanity stands for a big challenge: how to pursue global human well-being and safeguard the integrity of earth's life-supporting systems? This is a question I will not and cannot answer, but it is a very important one that concerns us all and the future of our planet.

My informants and store respondents had a critical attitude towards the economy and the staged experiences companies create for product experiences. Johan said: "if it says that it is grown in Sweden, I trust it, it is real... Something grown close by is always what I would choose. But the fact that Swedishness would be more genuine is just a concept. You can sell things on it, as your brand, that it is Swedish and people buy it in full" (interview, Johan). In the store a 36 year old woman told me she buys ecologically often because it is important for the earth: "it is one of the only things we can do as a consumer" (shop-along interview, respondent 40). People start to realize the urgency of global issues and are being confronted with them more and more. The planetary problems have become so compelling that many of these staged marketing experiences are no longer a good fit for the consumers wanted experiences. The actor Origin loses much of its power and becomes a weak actor if food origin is predominantly associated as a marketing tool in the experience economy. Big companies and marketing strategies are often portrayed as self-confined and mean. But relational semiotics through which we make sense of the world cannot be restricted to the terms good or bad. The good and the bad is embedded in the real and the real in the good and the bad (Law, 2007). Strictly interpreting food origin through dialectic terms of good and bad is not enough. Rather, it is the relational web and the enactment into being, the performativity that we are faced with interpreting. Therefore the actor Origin works best if it succeeds in exposing the realities of global interwovenness, like production. This way it might deliver honest and transparent messages to the consumer.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Buying meaningfulness

The idea of eating food that is produced with care and consideration for both health and the environment is appealing to most consumers. What is good, however, is very individual and contextually dependent; what is good for one is not good enough for another. What people consume and take into their bodies has a symbolic significance, it carries and communicates cultural meaning and it says something about the individual's identity (Graffman & Östberg, 2018). What is good is also negotiable for the moment; what is not perceived as good on a weekday can be good on Saturday night. Food choices are not fixed but are determined by both time and place, by people's mood and the social environment.

Food origin is a product attribute that affects the meanings consumers associate with food and affects consumers' food choices. This thesis has shown how actor Origin works and how it relates to people's food choices. I have subsumed food origin under the category of actor so that it broadened the category, allowing it to include non-human, non-rational entities. I have claimed that it acts as an actor and referred to it as the actor Origin when performing as such.

It is apparent that the perception consumers have in Sweden of the cultural category food origin is positively loaded. Not only because it provides information about the origin of a product, which is certainly a good thing. Food origin teaches us something crucial about the kind of actorship that technologies may take upon themselves. Food is the end product of a larger production network. In this network, Origin is a contextual actor that is much variable over time and variable over place. In this thesis I have related various aspects of this actorship by using the notion of *fluid*. The use of the tool, food origin, is fluid. I have sketched, what de Laet and Mol (2002) call the mechanics of this fluid technology.

The first aspect of actor Origin's fluidity is that its boundaries are not solid and sharp, it is entangled in terms of both its performance and its nature, in a variety of worlds. Food origin is an informative tool, it is a geographical indication, but it is also a device installed by food producers, a quality promotor and a trust-building apparatus. It has each of these identities and each comes with its own different boundaries. The use of food origin is a different thing for tomatoes in a Swedish food store, than it is when informing the consumer about, say, apples on the local marketplace. This also frames the question about whether or not the tool succeeds in its activities, since this is different for each of its identities.

The second, related aspect of actor Origin's fluidity is that whether or not its activities are successful is not a binary matter. There are many more relevant answers to this question

than a simple yes or no. Furthermore Origin's fluidity does not always give answers because its property is to remain open for interpretation. Food origin may work as a quality promotor and yet not bring quality. It may work to connect Swedish food products but fail as a connecting element in Sweden for Danish meat. It may conceal production realities but it may also expose them. It may work as a dominant actor in the food store for a while and then it appears as passive, for it is dormant. It may lead to a loss of trust because of its fluid and ambiguous character, but it may just as well lead to creativity with food producers and marketeers. Good technologies, as de Laet and Mol (2002) tell us, are those which incorporate the possibility of their own break-down. Those which have the flexibility to deploy an alternative way of working, and as such continue to work to some extent even if some properties fall out or the user community changes.

For all that, the thesis showed that people want high quality when shopping for groceries. But just as good food is defined differently, quality is also defined differently. According to *Konsumtionsrapporten* (Consumption report) a report from the Centrum För Konsumtionsvetenskap (2012), consumption of food has become an increasingly important aspect for human well-being. Even the price sensitive consumer today has a varied range of different quality levels on food. That people want high quality while looking for a good price is no paradoxical behaviour. The quality of food is an overall concept that deals with traditions concerning preparation, narrative, social community, appearance and layout, taste and smell. Much points to that these themes actually are, for most consumers, more important than ethics and morals. Therefore the actor Origin is a valuable tool for individuals as it justifies the choices they make, as it easily adapts and responds to people's search for qualitative and credible food. My informants have given me knowledge of the meaning and value they assign to different food products. At the same time, through their statements combined with the analytical tools and theories I have chosen for my thesis, I can also capture general patterns in contemporary society. It is likely that consumers will experience that local and Swedish produce is more qualitative than other types of food for instance. No matter what labels these products have. Human beings react immediately to emotional impulses and therefore the locally and the Swedish have a head start in front of EU-standardizations.

6.2 Applicability

The research project that formed the basis for this thesis was conducted for two food producers in Sweden, it goes without saying that the knowledge this thesis has produced is of value to the (Swedish) food industry. My goal during the project was to combine and take into account different stakeholders' respective views on the usefulness or uselessness of something or other.

My aim of the thesis differed from the project and has been to show that, rather than encountering either different people's private (unrelated) perceptions of food origin or one cultural construction perceived in different (unrelated) ways. In fact the articulations of the perception of food origin I have presented above seem to club together to perform a singular task. Namely that of qualifying how consumers make sense of their choice-making in food stores in Sweden on a daily basis, even for all the possible disorientating choices that loom. I provided food producers with knowledge about the fluidity of the tool food origin and showed its strengths and weaknesses. The intention of giving them knowledge is so they can reflect upon it and that it can serve as a basis for actions and improvements. Development that leads to better services to consumers and society. Consumers hold high knowledge of how the current food system can develop better. Do people want to buy food wrapped in plastic, while we know it is no good idea to use plastic? What can the industry do to develop better material?

The secondary objective, related to the first, was to make people/consumers understand cultural and economic processes so they can see the system we are inevitably part of and help open up an exploratory road to rethink food consumption for the better of society. The intention is not primarily to invite people to start revolting against this system, not to subversively disrupt the system in favor of anything else, but to offer tools for self-understanding. What are we humans really doing? Only after we have gained such an understanding can we start thinking about how we want it, if there are aspects of our current way of acting that may be counterproductive, that simply does not serve utility or risks to sustain the unsustainable.

Around the perception of food origin in Sweden, my informants and respondents chipped in responsibly and realistically, calibrating features of their world. Together, these people and things contributed to building a joint understanding of food origin, which is powerful because it is anything but self-sufficient and accordingly it evokes just the right amount of positive feelings.

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8. Appendix

appendix 1:

GRUNDINFORMATION

Dagens datum:

Plats:

Tid:

Intervjuarens namn:

Informantens namn:

Födelseort:

Ålder:

Kön:

Bostadsvanor

Vilken typ av boende idag:

Bostadsyta:

Familj

Födelseordning i syskonskara:

Mammas ålder ----- _____ yrke _____
boendeort

Mammas etniska bakgrund:

Pappas ålder _____ yrke _____ boendeort

Pappas etniska bakgrund:

Föräldrar gifta/skilda/sammanboende/särbo:

Informanten

Utbildning:

Yrke:

Ungefärlig årsinkomst:

Gift/sammanboende:

Gift vilket år:

Skild vilket år:

Omgift/ny relation vilket år:

Barn (ålder, kön och boendeort)

Namn: ----- _____ (år) _____ (bor)

Media

TV, vilka kanaler eller plattformar används mest:

Tidning:

Mobiltelefon: ----- _____ (varumärke)

_____ (inköpt år)

Dator: _____ (varumärke) _____

(inköpt år)

Använder dator tim/dag:

Använder dator till:

Använder telefonen till:

Övrigt

Religion:

Hur aktiv: mycket ibland sällan/enstaka aldrig

Fritidsintresse:

Hur aktiv: mycket ibland sällan/enstaka aldrig

Fritidsintresse:

Hur aktiv: : mycket ibland sällan/enstaka aldrig

appendix 2:

INTERVJUGUIDE

- Berätta lite om dina/familjens matvanor.
 - Vad ger mat för upplevelse?
 - Tillfredsställelse? Mättnad? Glädje? Sammanhållning?... ect
 - Ångest vid ”fel” mat?
 - Hur mycket styr vanor dina matbeteenden?
 - Familjebildarnas ansvar gentemot barnen?
 - Hur stor är påverkan från barnen? Känner du ansvar till barnen?
 - Hemlagat? Tid? Stress?
 - Vad anser du om: ”Leva som man lär” (dvs säger man att ekologiskt är viktigt men man köper inte...)
 - Etisk och moraliskt förhållande? Vad påverkar dig?
-
- Hälsans roll vid matlagning?
 - Hur går tankarna kring nyttig och hälsosam mat?
 - Kalorier? Vikt? Allergier?
 - Livsstil? Hänger medvetna matval ihop med en speciell livsstil?
 - Vad är kvalitet för dig? På vilka sätt?
-
- Noterar du vad som skrivs/sägs i media om eko/mat/miljö?
 - Vilseläda forskning? Eller svårbegriplig forskning?
 - Hur mycket påverkas du tror du av detta?
 - Litar du på vad som sägs i media?
 - Vet du vad skillnaden mellan ekologiskt, lokalt odlat, svenskt, kravmärkt, Fair Trade, klimatsmart, etc. är?
 - Vad betyder dessa begrepp för dig? Vad är viktigast?
 - Tror du på alla olika märkningar och ursprung?
-
- Äkthet? Vad är det egentligen?
 - Hur yttrar det sig?
 - Äkta?! Är äkta äkta? Hur och varför?
 - Platsens betydelse? Samhörighet med affären, de som jobbar där, producenterna?
 - Lokal förankring?
 - Vad betyder ”svenskt” för dig?
 - Är svenskhet äkta?
 - Affärens påtryckningar?
 - Presentation? Visuellt tilltalande?
 - Utseende på varan?
 - Var brukar maten inhandlas? Specifika affärer? (Butik, marknad, nätet, etc. ?)
-
- Hur är själva upplevelsen att handla mat?
 - Saknar du något i de affärer du handlar i?
 - Vad är bäst/sämst med att handla mat?

- Vad tycker du om de nya koncept för handel som startats på senare år (prenumerations tjänster/ e-handel)?
- Har du tänkt på om det finns någon tjänst kopplad till att handla mat som du saknar idag?