Food and identity: Reflexive culture’s consequences from personal projects to programmatic authenticity

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“You eat what you are”

- Pre-reflexive food identity, an example:
  - “kallaalimernit”
    - “a small piece of Greenlander”
  - “quallunaamernit”
    - “a small piece of foreigner”

- An immediate relationship between food and identity
  - Endless accounts of “us and them” identifiers
"pause er lig med PØLSE!"
You are what you eat

From “cultural determinism” to “becoming who you are”
Modern self-identities are reflexive (Giddens 1991)

“The ‘identity’ of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness”

- Issues of...
  - Body
  - Risk
  - Authenticity
  - Narrative / project
Bodily reflexivity

- “I am what I eat!”
  - A profoundly instituted relationship between beliefs concerning food and health / food and life quality

- Competing expert systems
  - Also including food researchers in marketing ;-) 

- Reflexive food: social marking, enmities, scares and fashions
  - “Leaving the milky way”
  - “If it feels good, it must be right”
  - “mundane brand resistance” in the middle classes
You are where you eat (Bell & Valentine 1997)

- **Body**
  - "Healthism" (Crawford), genetic disposition, technologies of body

- **Home**
  - Home cooked meals, household care, meal practices,…

- **Community**
  - Dietary fads and fashions, vegetarianism, halal /kosher,…

- **City**
  - Urban foodscapes, localism (e.g., craft brewing)

- **Region**
  - Regional produce, AOC, identity politics,…

- **Nation**
  - National cuisines as a "global structure of common difference" (Wilk)

- **Global**
  - Fair trade, sustainability, global warming,…
Reflexive culture

- Culture as a performative act
  - No longer “the water fish swim in”

- In search for (authenticated) cultural narratives (mediated through food) to sustain the self-projects
  - Alison James: global and local food discourses and British food identity

- “Learning to be local”
  - Marshall Sahlins, Richard Wilk,…
  - “New Greenlandic Cuisine”
# Global and local identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global market</th>
<th>Without authenticity script</th>
<th>With authenticity script</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>Expatriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Creolized</td>
<td>Nostalgic</td>
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Visitors to Greenland often go for whale-, iceberg- and glacier-watching tours, but active overland travel (beyond dog-sledding) is now becoming more enticing. Working farms sit among the fjords of southern Greenland, where a changing climate and a longer growing season have fueled interest in the new Greenlandic cuisine. Hikers can walk along trails between farms near Qaqortoq and Narsarsuaq for rustic beds and unusual farm-to-table meals like whale skin with angelica herb, garlic and rosemary pickles. (NYT.COM – 50 places to go in 2015)

"Reclaiming Greenland's national identity, insists champion chef Inunnguaq Hegelund, also means reclaiming its national cuisine." (" Fresh from the freezer: gourmet food in Greenland", The Guardian.co.uk, 9/11/2012)
A brief history of Greenlandic food identity

1. Pre-colonial Greenlandic fare
   - Hunter-gatherer society + Norse legacy (?)

2. Colonial Greenlandic fare
   - Civilizing process and the KGH (KNI) monopoly

3. Post-colonial Greenlandic fare
   - Fishing vs hunter-gatherer economy

4. New Greenlandic cuisine
   - Programmatic authenticity

I. self-other dialectic

II. Market dominance and mediation

III. Romantization

IV. glocal cultural reflexivity
Three routes of value circulation
Mediators: market and nature

“Although I can buy Greenlandic food here at work, like seal, dried fish and mattak and those kinds of things, then I really miss being able to go down to the board and buy fresh goods and then go home and cook it [...] You know freshly caught fish, cod, red-fish, father-lasher and catfish, and lumpsucker and seal and birds, you know freshly-caught, I really miss that.” (fem. migrant, 36)

”The sourish, half-digested content from the newly cut up reindeer’s stomach. It tastes like some kind of fresh salad with yoghurt”
(fem. migrant, quoted in Nilsson 1982, p 53)
a guy called Steen has this little hobby farm in the Ameralik Fjord, it’s on an old Norse ruin actually. And someone once said to him, ”you should start cultivating the soil in there” and as he turned the soil he could actually smell the manure from their [Norse settlers] household animals because it has just been lying there under the permafrost […] and the carrots are growing really close because there is so much nutrition in that soil (chef, male age 40).
A contemporary Greenlandic gastronomy

This is an example of last week’s menu [...] scallops with wild mussels with a spinach ravioli [...] and a soup made of mussels, Steen’s potatoes as a puree and the small walnut potatoes smoked, smoked, and fresh chips, butter sauce and smoked Greenlandic lamb [...] main course, I think was musk ox smoked with paprika [...] and then a crebinet, like a meatball, reindeer meatball with cheese and an emulation of Labrador tea [...] and then the sweets we have made a mousse of white chocolate and blueberries and then a crispy shell and a blueberry sorbet and a crème brulée with arctic thyme and a cake based on crowberries [...] (Chef, male age 40)
Programmatic authenticity?

- Programmatic authenticity (Kjeldgaard, Askegaard & Arnould)
  - An emergent cuisine that is interpreted as “authentic”
    - Not staged authenticity
    - Not “creolized culture” (e.g. Suasaat, the “national soup”)

- A combination of (cf. Grayson and Martinec 2004):
  1. Paradigmatic indexical authenticity
     - Central elements are chosen among classical Greenlandic fare
  2. Syntagmatic iconic authenticity
     - Elements present in a format that is recognizable and “consumable” as a contemporary cuisine
"The thing is that I would never consider buying any of these products. If I want something healthy, I rather go directly to the source instead of buying something that has been through so many processes and then mixed into a sort of product"
BRANDED AUTHENTICITY

GENERIC PRODUCE

"NON-BRAND" (CRAFTED PRODUCT)

"BRAND"

NON GENERIC PRODUCE (INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT)

Implication of syntheticity

Contrariety of production mode

Contradiction of chronology

Contrariety of materiality

Implication of organicity

Contrariety of naturality

AUTHENTIC BRANDING


Thank you for your attention…

Questions?

THE END