

Materially constituting a sustainable food transition: the case of vegan eating practices

T091.1 EXPLORING THE ROLE OF MATERIALS IN PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABILITY



European Association for the Study
of Science and Technology

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Outline



- How is vegan eating materially constituted?
 - A focus on what vegans do with food as part of the material constitution of the practice
 - Identification of four overlapping modes of material work with food which are part of an explanation for the reproduction and greater diffusion/normalisation of the practice
 - How food materialities relate to other elements in the practice

Researching Vegan Practice



- Participant Observer at UK vegan festivals 2012 – 2016
- 40 vegans interviewed June – December 2013
 - Recruited via advert in Vegan Society magazine & vegan groups
 - Focus on the personal narrative of transition; how vegans 'do veganism' on an everyday basis; & social relationships.
- 2016 Ipsos Mori data on veganism in the UK

UK vegans

4

- Vegans as an untapped and undervalued sustainability resource
- Transition competences
- More vegan infrastructure also = more scope for meat/dairy reduction
- 2016 Ipsos Mori poll places number of UK vegans at 542,000 or 1% of the adult population

The Telegraph

HOME | NEWS | SPO

Lifestyle | **Food and drink**

Recipes | Beer | Wine | Healthy eating | Restaurants | Pubs and bars | Wine shop

🏠 > Lifestyle > Food and drink > Food and drink news

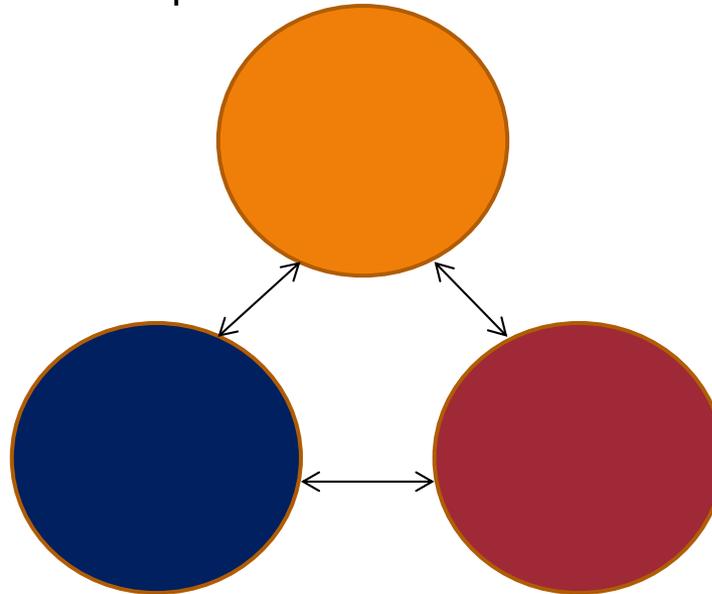
Number of vegans in Britain rises by 360% in 10 years



Elements of a practice

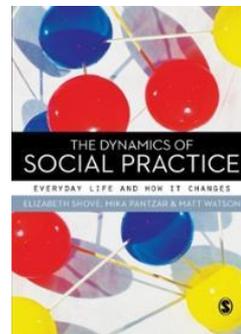
“practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when *connections* between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken”
(Shove et. al. 2012, p14-5)

COMPETENCY – Knowledge, skills and techniques



MEANINGS – Symbolic meanings, ideas, norms, values, ethics, aspirations

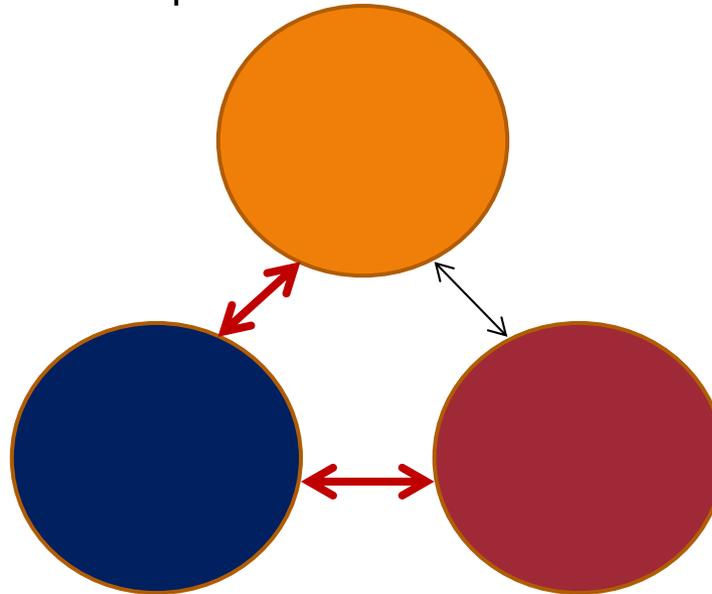
MATERIALS – Things, technologies, infrastructures



Elements of a practice

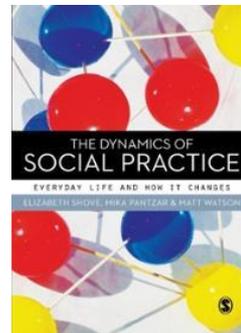
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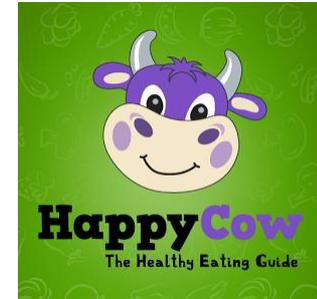


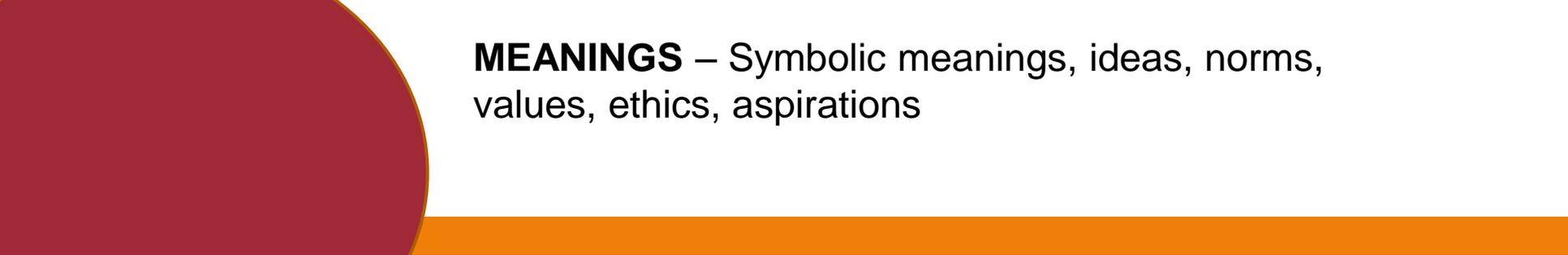
SOURCE: SHOVE, E *et al* (2012) The Dynamics of Social Practice – Everyday Life and How it Changes

COMPETENCY – Knowledge, skills and techniques



- New cooking skills
- Use of new foods & recipes
- Literacy of animal ingredients
- Knowledge of local food sources (including restaurants)
- How to exist as vegan when travelling
- How to socially co-exist in a non-vegan world
- Nutritional knowledge

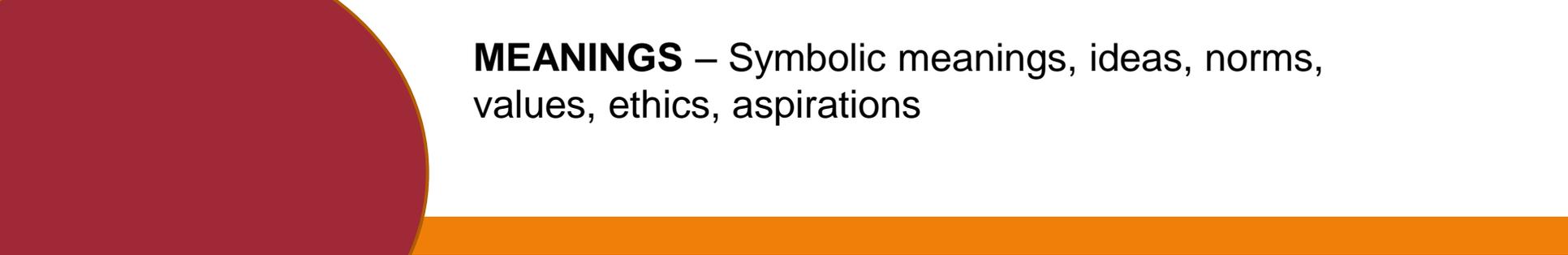




MEANINGS – Symbolic meanings, ideas, norms, values, ethics, aspirations

PART 1 – FROM DOMINANT PRACTICES

- **Positive stereotypes of Animal consumption** Meat as an assumed part of a meal, associations with masculinity, strength, nationalism, a ‘natural’ order, being human.
- A social norm that views **food choices as private/personal**
- **Negative stereotypes of veganism** as austere, weak, extreme and involving sacrifice
- The vegan as *other*, as strange, as a killjoy



MEANINGS – Symbolic meanings, ideas, norms, values, ethics, aspirations

PART 2 – VEGAN CONTESTATION OF MEANINGS

- Vegans involved in their own positive representation – **veganism as healthy, ethical, strong and pleasurable**
- Ethical arguments for veganism, for the moral considerability of animals
- Food practices **not private, but political** (as having impacts)
- Positive associations with **peace, non-violence, and sustainability**
- Vegans also involved in contesting the meanings of what is ‘good nutrition’

MATERIALS – Things, technologies, infrastructures

- **Vegan food itself – taste, inc. substitutes**
- Kitchen materialities
- Infrastructure – distribution, shops, events, the food economy
- Materials with strong links to competences:-
 - Vegan nutrition charts
 - Vegan guides
 - Web-sites, blogs & media



FATS	PROTEIN	VITAMINS	MINERALS	FIBRE
<p>FATS</p> <p>Avocado Olive oil Walnuts Almonds Nuts</p>	<p>PROTEIN</p> <p>Beans, Lentils Soy milk Wheatgrass Spirulina Nuts Mushrooms</p>	<p>VITAMINS</p> <p>A Carrots Spinach Kale Yellow peppers Mango</p> <p>B group Soy milk Wheatgrass Spirulina Nuts Mushrooms</p> <p>B12 Fortified plant-based milk Fortified cereals Soy milk Mushrooms</p> <p>C Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>D Fortified cereals Soy milk Mushrooms</p> <p>E Olive oil Avocado Almonds Walnuts Wholegrains</p> <p>K Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p>	<p>IRON Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>CALCIUM Almonds Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>ZINC Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>IODINE Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>MAGNESIUM Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>PHOSPHORUS Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p> <p>Other trace elements Green leafy vegetables Kale Spinach Broccoli Pumpkin seeds Pineapple Mango</p>	<p>FIBRE</p> <p>Wholegrain flour Wholegrain bread Wholegrain pasta Wholegrain cereals Fruit and vegetables Nuts & seeds Beans, lentils Soy milk Wheatgrass Spirulina Nuts Mushrooms</p>

Practice Dynamics and Interventions

- Elements (meanings, materialities and competences) comprising the practice can change
 - On the one hand “the presence of objects both stabilizes and regularizes doings and sayings” (Schatzki 2002: 107; see also Reckwitz 2002: 206) but also the introduction of new objects may partly co-ordinate new practices.
- Elements can be better connected or connections may erode
- The populations of ‘carriers’ of the practice can change
- The way in which one practice ‘bundles’ together with others can shape both the practice and its elements.
 - Re-crafting Practices or elements
 - Substituting Practices or elements
 - Changing how Practices Interlock

For more on these last three See Spurling, N. et al. (2013). Interventions in practice: re-framing policy approaches to consumer behaviour. Report by the Sustainable Practices Research Group

1. Material Substitution

12

- The last five years - a significant growth in the availability and quality of meat, cheese, milk, egg, yoghurt, margarine substitutes
- Provide a continuity to food routines
- As a processed food (skilled materiality) they afford time savings
- Domesticate veganism as familiar rather than other
- Participants found them useful in transition though with some ambivalence e.g. may conflict with health meanings of veganism or be seen as symbolically too close to animal consumption



IT'S LIKE
MILK, BUT
MADE FOR
HUMANS.



2. Food Creativity

13

- There is a creative d.i.y. strand to substitution
- Vegans use the verb 'to veganise' to refer to the cooking of traditional meals in vegan form (retain prior food identities)
- Participants reported a renewed engagement with food, to try out new recipes, do their own baking and to make their own substitutes e.g. vegan cheese
- The discovery of aquafaba (chick pea brine) as a versatile egg substitute in 2015 went viral around social media



3. Exploring New Foods

14

- An interesting finding from this research is the tendency of vegans to explore new foods that they hadn't explored prior to transition.
- This subverts the negative meaning of restriction and suggests veganism for at least a significant number of practitioners to be an expansive, abundant diet and transition a time of exploring new foods and incorporating them into food routines.
- “There’s so many things that I’ve tried since being vegan I’d never have known about or tried before, you know, coconut oil spread on toast instead of butter, which is absolutely gorgeous, nutritional yeast which I use, and you know, just all the different sort of vegetables, like kohlrabi, I’d never had a kohlrabi before” (Fiona, 43).



4. Taste Transition

15

- Participants spoke of taste as a dynamic experience rather than a fixed category
- Transition involved trying out new tastes and becoming aware that it took time to get used to new flavours
- Prior aesthetic enjoyment of animal products became retrospectively couched in terms of disgust
- A “taste regime problematizes objects by continually questioning how they align with the regime’s core meanings” (Arsel & Bean 2012: 907).
- The dominant cultural ‘taste regime’ was contested and replaced by one closely tied to ethical meanings



Some elemental connections...

- As well as promoting a **more normalised, domesticated doing of veganism**, substitution also **builds competency into the object itself**. Substitution represents one of the quickest ways in which a society might achieve a sustainable food transition.
- New food exploration and food creativity actively contest mainstream meanings of vegan practice, promoting instead a veganism of **skill** not simplicity; **choice** not loss or restriction; **pleasure** not blandness; transition as **easy** not unobtainable.
- This new 'taste regime' is open to experimentalism and novelty. It de-fetishizes animal products, and partly fetishizes its own foods in a broader interweaving of ethical and aesthetic meanings.

THANKS FOR LISTENING...

RECENT PAPERS:

- Probyn-Rapsey, F. et. al. (2016) 'A sustainable campus: the Sydney declaration on interspecies sustainability', *Animal Studies Journal* vol. 5 (1), pp.110-151. [Open access: http://ro.Uow.Edu.Au/asj/vol5/iss1/8](http://ro.Uow.Edu.Au/asj/vol5/iss1/8)
- Twine, R. (2015) 'Understanding snacking through a practice theory lens', *Sociology of Health and Illness* vol. 37 no. 8, pp. 1270–1284.
- Twine, R. (2014) 'Vegan killjoys at the table - contesting happiness and negotiating relationships with food practices', *Societies* vol.4, no.4, pp.623-639. [Open access: http://www.Mdpi.Com/2075-4698/4/4/623/html](http://www.Mdpi.Com/2075-4698/4/4/623/html)

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