This is a repository copy of *Families and food: beyond the "cultural turn"?* .

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/74379/

Open Access

Social Geography

Families and food: beyond the "cultural turn"?

P. Jackson

Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK

Abstract. This paper provides some personal reflections on the "cultural turn" in human geography including a tentative chronology of events. It outlines some of the characteristics of the "cultural turn" and some of the criticisms that have been levelled against it. In the body of the paper, I attempt to assess the value of the "cultural turn", conceptually and methodologically, as applied to two recent research projects on the geography of food and families. The paper concludes that the "cultural turn" greatly enriched the study of human geography through its analysis of discourse, representation and practice. But other approaches are required to explain broader changes in political-economy and the materiality of nature. While the "cultural turn" contributed to our understanding of materiality and our place in a more-than-human world, geographers are now also embracing other approaches such as those informed by actor-network theory and geographies of emotion, embodiment and affect. The paper concludes with an agenda for future research on the political and moral economies of food, focusing on contemporary consumer anxieties at a range of geographical scales.

1 Introduction

The conference at which this paper was presented demonstrated that no single history of human geography's "cultural turn" can be written. Instead, the participants recalled many different narratives of the people, places, institutions and events which are now collectively remembered as having comprised a single intellectual movement. We should therefore resist the idea that the "new cultural geography" was invented in one place and exported to other places, subject to a time-lag and the distortions of distance. Instead, I would urge us to understand the "cultural turn" as involving multiple conversations across different disciplines and national traditions, subject to different forms of institutionalisation (through learned societies, academic journals and disciplinary conferences), shaped by diverse sources of research funding and complex collaborations (and conflicts) across disciplines and intellectual traditions.

It is similarly impossible to claim that the "new cultural geography" has achieved some kind of hegemony within the discipline. Rather, I would argue, human geography demonstrates a healthy diversity of intellectual strands and methodological approaches. I would, however, want to retain the label as a rallying point, providing an academic support network and source of energy and inspiration for a group of like-minded colleagues. The fact that this conference attracted over 200 delegates, including a high proportion of graduate students, suggests that the field is alive and well and that our meeting together serves a valuable purpose. Maybe the label does not matter (and asserting the novelty of the "new" cultural geography has always struck me as rather barbaric). But these kinds of networks are important and should be cherished. To borrow a phrase from Sarah Whatmore, they are "nourishing networks" on which we all depend.

This paper begins with a personal account of the "cultural turn" in human geography and with a tentative chronology of events. I will then attempt to outline some of the movement's key characteristics and some of the criticisms that have been levelled against it. In the main part of the paper, I attempt to assess the conceptual value and methodological utility of the "cultural turn" by evaluating its application to two recent research projects on the geography of food and families: *Manufacturing Meaning along the Food Commodity Chain* (or *Food Stories* to use the project's shorter title) and *Changing Families, Changing Food*.[1] The paper concludes that the

---

"cultural turn" enriched human geography through its analysis of the politics of representation, discourse and identity and through its emphasis on human agency and social practice. But it also has clear limitations in terms of its ability to analyse questions of political economy and materiality. Though the "cultural turn" contributed to our understanding of the materiality of nature and our place in a "more-than-human" world, geographers are now also embracing other approaches such as those informed by actor-network theory and geographies of embodiment, emotion and affect.

2 The "cultural turn"

Human geography's "cultural turn" was part of a wider intellectual movement across the social sciences that brought these subjects into closer dialogue with the arts and humanities. The turn towards cultural studies and other disciplines with an interest in the politics of representation marked a sharp break with the kind of spatial analysis that had dominated human geography since the 1970s and also implied a critique of more totalising forms of Marxian political-economy. The cultural turn might also be identified with a growing interest in social theory among human geographers, signalled by the publication of Derek Gregory and John Urry's (1985) *Social relations and spatial structures.* Others have argued that geography's cultural turn was accompanied by a "spatial turn" across the social sciences, a claim most forcefully advanced in Ed Soja's *Postmodern geographies* (1989) and which was demonstrated by the popularity of David Harvey's argument about the human consequences of time-space compression in *The condition of postmodernity* (1989).

As I argued in my own book *Maps of meaning*, a key characteristic of the "new" cultural geography was a social constructionist view of the world involving multiple ways of seeing, a plurality of cultures and sub-cultures, and a politics of position where researchers came to acknowledge their own implication in their field of study (Jackson, 1989). Drawing on the language of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, cultural geographers sought to redefine culture as "the way in which groups "handle" the raw material of their social and material existence . . . the codes with which meaning is constructed, conveyed and understood . . . the *maps of meaning* through which the world is made intelligible" (Hall and Henderson, 1976:10, emphasis added). Arguably, and with the benefit of hindsight, we might argue that the "new" cultural geography placed too much emphasis on cultural codes, symbolic meanings and modes of representation and too little emphasis on the "raw materials" of human existence. Such, at least, has been the assertion of those, like me, who have called for a "rematerialization" of social and cultural geography (Jackson, 2000).

Given my previous comments about the multiple histories of the "cultural turn", any chronology is bound to be partial and highly subjective. Recalling key events, conferences and publications demonstrates the significance of personal memory, specific social networks and localised political interests. Who was present at these events, where they occurred and what key messages were taken from them by different participants would make a fascinating study in the sociology of knowledge. My own memories of the "cultural turn" in human geography would begin with a series of papers in *Area* (1980) and *Antipode* (1983).[2] I would also identify two conferences on "New directions in cultural geography" held at University College London and the University of British Columbia in 1987 with some overlap in terms of key participants. We might then trace the institutionalisation of these changes, including the renaming of the Social *and Cultural* Geography Study Group of the RGS-IBG which took place in 1988 and the consolidation of these ideas at the "New words, new worlds" conference in Edinburgh in 1991. The pace of change was such that already, by September 1991, Nigel Thrift could remark on "the hegemony of culture in social science and (at least generationally) in geography" (Thrift, 1991:144). Within a decade, the achievements of geography's cultural turn were celebrated in the publication of *Cultural turns, geographical turns* (Naylor et al., 2000) and criticisms of the movement were already being expressed (on which more, below).

Characterising geography's "cultural turn" is an even more hazardous undertaking than charting its chronology. A key concern was the development of a politics of representation, following earlier feminist arguments about visibility and voice, and enshrined in key texts like *Writing cultures* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). The concern for narrative style and modes of representation was later caricatured by one critic as a "descent into discourse" (Palmer, 1990). A related concern was the development of a cultural politics of identity and difference, which broadened geography's interest in the politics of gender, sexuality, race and disability but which some saw as an abandonment of other kinds of class-based solidarity (Hobsbawm, 1996). A third trend was the shift of geographical attention from production to consumption which Nicky Gregson parodied in her rhetorical question: "and now it's all consumption?" (Gregson, 1995) asking whether our sudden fascination with questions of identity and difference (in the sphere of consumption) did not risk abandoning more fundamental questions about inequality and power (and their connection to specific modes of production).

The success of the "cultural turn" in establishing near-hegemonic status within human geography did not go

---

[2]The editor of *Area* remarked at the time about the coincidence of three papers about cultural geography arriving simultaneously on his desk "unsolicited and independently", wondering whether they might mark the beginnings of a general revival of cultural geography (Blacksell, 1980:105). The papers in *Antipode* were even more diverse in terms of their intellectual orientation and relationship to an avowedly "radical geography".

unchallenged. Price and Lewis (1993) railed against the "reinvention" of cultural geography while Les Rowntree sought to defend the premature dismissal of the new cultural geography as "old wine in new bottles" (Rowntree, 1988). Ten years later, Clive Barnett (1998) offered a more trenchant critique of the "cultural turn" as a kind of intellectual fashion, with its cult of academic celebrity and its rapid turnover of ideas and personalities. He also detected a commercialisation of knowledge production associated with the proliferation of new journals and the market dominance of particular academic publishers. Cultural geography's success was a source of thin-disguised envy in other branches of human geography, with Rodriguez-Posé (2001) suggesting that economic geography, in particular, was being "killed with a "cultural turn" overdose". He need not have feared as indications soon appeared that the "cultural turn" had completed its cycle of innovation and was about to be challenged by new ideas and approaches. The following year, Catherine Nash (2002) detected that cultural geography was 'in crisis', while new currents of thought associated with actor-network theory and the non- or more-than-representational rapidly proliferated (Lorimer, 2005).

Again, with hindsight, it is possible to identify some significant absences, gaps and silences within geography's "cultural turn". These would include a neglect of the evolving political economy which was all the more remarkable, as the development of the "cultural turn" coincided with the Thatcher-Reagan years, the rise of neoliberalism and the political transformations sweeping across Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall (Cosgrove, 1990). Despite the centrality of cultural materialism in some accounts of the "new" cultural geography (informed by the work of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson among others), one could argue (as noted above) that the "cultural turn" led to an over-emphasis on symbolic systems and the interpretation of meaning and to an under-emphasis on the material (now being addressed through geography's rapidly-growing interest in material culture). Human geography's endorsement of a social constructionist approach tended to reduce the natural world to a series of cultural representations, rather than engaging directly with what Sarah Whatmore (2006) has called a "more-than-human world". Finally, one could argue that the interest in social constructionism and modes of representation led to an over-emphasis on the textual and discursive construction of human identity and social life to the comparative neglect of practice-based approaches to the study of everyday social action. I shall now explore the significance of these criticisms in the specific context of my recent work on families and food.

3   Focusing on families and food

In this section of the paper I wish to examine the strengths and weaknesses of various conceptual and methodological approaches informed by the "cultural turn" as demonstrated in two recent research projects with which I have been involved. The *Food Stories* project used a life history approach to examine recent changes in the British food industry, focusing on the supply chains of two specific commodities: chicken and sugar. Unlike most studies of commodity chains which attempt to identify the points at which value is added and profit extracted, we attempted to identify the way the meanings of food change as it moves along the supply chain "from farm to fork". In the case of chicken, we undertook interviews with hatchery managers and chicken growers, agricultural technologists and category managers, retailers and buyers. For sugar, we interviewed key players in the UK beet industry and in the imported sugar cane market, comparing the intensive regulation of the sugar industry with the more laissez-faire approach to the regulation of the broiler chicken industry. The life history approach allowed us to probe the interweaving of personal (biographical) and professional (commercial) narratives and to understand the process of "manufacturing meaning" along the supply chain, aiming to capture the interweaving of political- and moral-economies (Jackson et al., 2009). The project focused on the role of memory and meaning in the construction of individual and corporate "food stories", developing the idea that (at least in the advertising-soaked economies of the global North) food is increasingly "sold with a story" (Freidberg, 2003). Our study also sought to understand how the materialities of chicken and sugar affected their commercial exploitation including issues of consumer confidence and trust.

The *Changing Families, Changing Food* project was a large, inter-disciplinary research programme involving a team of researchers from nursing and midwifery, clinical sciences and human nutrition as well as social scientists from sociology, psychology, human geography and cultural studies, together with researchers from health and social care. The premise was to examine recent changes in family life through the lens of food, taking a practice-based approach to "doing family" rather than understanding "the family" as an institution or unitary social form (Jackson, 2009). The programme involved fifteen inter-linked projects, organised across the life-course from pregnancy and motherhood, through childhood and family life, and including studies of family and the wider community (see Fig. 1). Most of the projects focused on the present-day or recent past and were UK-focused, with some comparative and historical work, designed to highlight the specificities of contemporary British culinary culture. The programme drew on a wide range of methods from historical and archival work, secondary data analysis, interviews, focus groups and various forms of ethnographic research including the analysis of food diaries and photographic evidence.

To be clear, both projects were inter-disciplinary in character but both raised significant geographical issues. In the case of Food Stories, for example, we were interested in questions of geographical provenance which seemed more important,
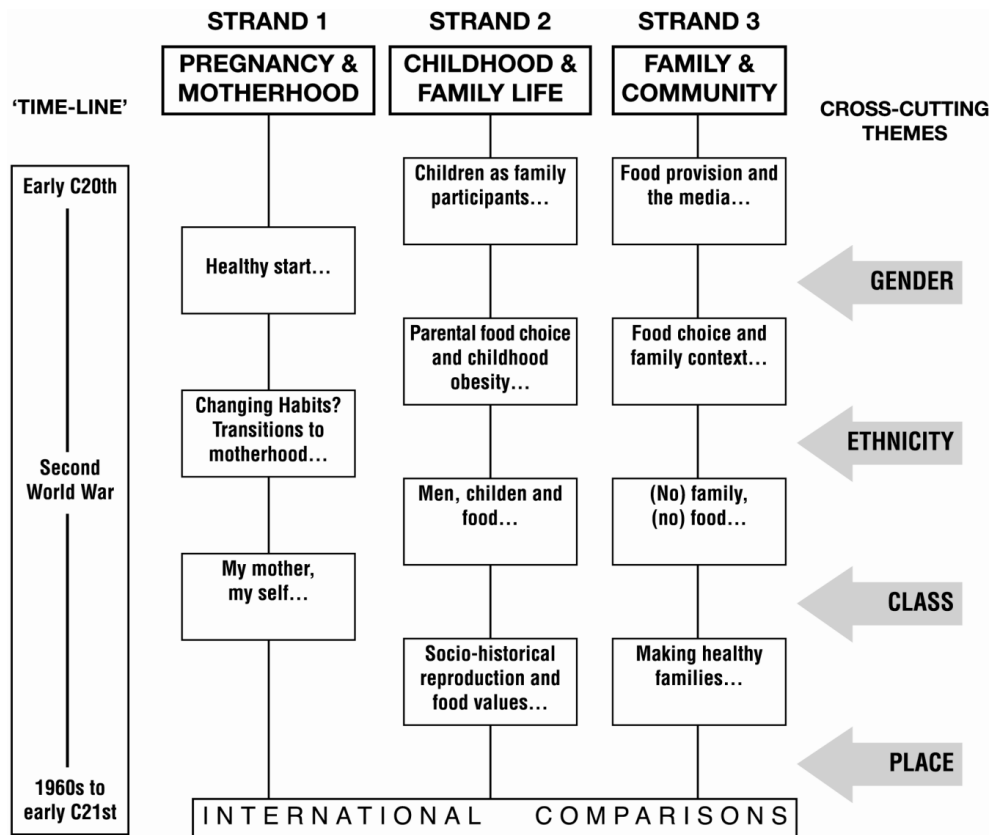
Figure 1. The Changing Families, Changing Food research programme (for further information see: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood).

in the eyes of consumers at least, for chicken than for sugar. In the Food and Families project, meanwhile, questions of locality were critical, mapping onto distinctions of social class and dietary patterns of under- and over-nutrition.

In evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the "cultural turn", I want now to consider the findings of these two recently-completed research projects. I will address the *Food Stories* project through a consideration of the materialities, meanings and markets of food, and I will consider the *Changing Families, Changing Food* programme through a discussion of the geographically and socially situated practices of "doing family".

3.1 Materialities, meanings and markets

Geographies associated with the "cultural turn" might be expected to focus on understanding meanings rather than engaging with materialities or markets. Our project sought to challenge this assumption, providing rich evidence about the materiality of different animal species and the way this affects their commercial exploitation. For some interviewees, for example, chicken are little more than a commodity. Others were always aware that there is a live animal at the end of the production line. Both views can be held by the same

person, as in the following extracts from Andrew Mackenzie, a protein category manager at a major British food retailer:

You talked about it [chicken] down to a unit or a commodity, I think that's a really good analogy...

It's a production line with chicken because it works on volume, 9000 an hour or whatever ... but it's a production [line] where something dies.[3]

Mark Ranson, an agricultural technologist at the same firm, also describes chicken as "much more of a commodity than other protein species".[4] Compare that assessment with the following comments from Ray Moore, a hatchery manager, talking about chicken as sentient beings with needs that can be communicated to the farmer:

Chicken talk to you, they do... they talk to you, you'll know whether they're cold, hungry, too hot. They need loving

---

[3]Andrew Mackenzie, interviewed February 2004. All of the interviews were conducted by Polly Russell and are deposited at The British Library in London (National Life Stories accession number C821). Extracts from some of the interviews can also be accessed via the Food Stories website: http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/foodstories.

[4]Mark Ranson, interviewed January 2004.

tender care, you know. Just the same as I look after my wife... you've got to look after them.[5]

By contrast, Audrey Kley, a chicken grower and friend of Ray Moore, describes how she avoids getting sentimental about chickens:

You've got to be hardened to it, haven't you. I mean it's not like your own pet dog when it dies, you get very upset, and you think about it for days... With the chickens ... there's no sort of affection or anything towards them, because they all look alike. And, well you just ... it's part of your work and you don't think about it. They come in, you know they're going to be killed the next day, but all you're doing is worrying that you've got enough food to see them through, that they're good and they're going to pay you some money, and you don't think about any of the other side of it.[6]

The materialities and meanings of chicken are also apparent in the following comment from Paul Wilgos, a senior agricultural technologist, comparing intensively-reared (broiler) chicken with free-range birds:

If you go into a broiler shed ... then go and see a flock of free-range birds, and they're sparky and flighty, they're excited, they're running in and out, they're having a great time... And you go into a broiler shed and they are lethargic... I think the animal's just, it's more interesting and I think the meat's got more character as a consequence.[7]

Our research also provided evidence of the lively materialities of chicken, compared to the stable properties of sugar in its refined form, demonstrated, for example, in its ability to cause food poisoning if incorrectly stored, prepared and cooked:

The meat that you worry about most is chicken isn't it? Cause it's like you can get so many different things from it (Consumer focus group, January 2007).

Capylobacter remains the most common cause of food poisoning for British consumers and its most frequent cause is contaminated poultry meat.[8] Chicken are also susceptible to animal diseases like hock burn, caused by excessive stocking densities, and have a propensity to "come off their legs" because the process of genetic selection has favoured the development of a disproportionate ratio of breast weight to leg strength driven by consumers' preference for white meat.

The link between materiality and meaning is also apparent in consumer attitudes to whole chickens and chicken portions (where the link with a live animal is still apparent) compared

to value-added or processed chicken (in ready-meals or other recipe dishes) where its origins are much less obvious. Consider, for example, this comment from Paul Wilgos, where his inability to put into words exactly what consumers find troubling about dealing with chicken speaks volumes about its commercial and cultural significance:

When you do a whole bird, you think that was a living animal... From a customer perspective, I think once an animal has been cut up, it loses much of its... in the customer's mind it's lost so much of its... what it was... Once it's become an ingredient in a recipe dish it's kind of lost all of its... The same concerns don't exist as they do for a whole piece of meat... So you know, we're developing things like oven-able trays... That's a direct request from customers saying they don't like touching raw meat.[9]

Consumer attitudes to animal welfare, coupled with anxieties about food safety and their ambivalence about the quality of imported food, mean that a premium attaches to British poultry. By contrast, British consumers have much less concern about the geographical provenance of sugar with most unable to detect any difference between sugar cane, imported from Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean, and sugar beet, grown domestically in East Anglia and Lincolnshire. As one of our informants put it, sugar is "sold like cement", piled high on supermarket shelves, stacked on industrial pallets, with little or no attempt to distinguish specific brand identities or types of sugar, apart from speciality sugars like muscovado or demerera.

Our interview material also throws light on the differences between how the markets for chicken and sugar are governed and regulated. Sugar was one of the first sectors to be included within the Common Agricultural Policy – subject to export quotas, import tariffs and minimum price guarantees – and it was one of the last sectors to be reformed (Ward et al., 2008). For many campaign groups and NGOs, this protectionist market has prevented fair competition and discouraged Third World producers from entering the market. In August 2002, for example, Oxfam published a report on *The Great Sugar Scam*, criticising the current sugar regime for generating "vast profits for big sugar producers and large farmers – and vast surpluses that are dumped on world markets" (Oxfam, 2002). Commenting on the report, an Oxfam representative argued that the sugar industry used words like efficiency and competitiveness but that those words are "completely irrelevant to any discussion of the sugar sector because there isn't a market":

This is essentially Bolshevism applied to agriculture... You know, you've got one company that's got the entire beet market in Britain. The government tells it what price it produces at. It helps facilitate exports, it protects against imports, it oversees a monopoly system through the quota arrangement. The company clearly does very well out of that, as reflected in their profit margins, and the beet growers

---

[5]Ray Moore, November 2003.

[6]Audrey Kley, September 2003.

[7]Paul Wilgos, January–June 2004.

[8]Foodborne diseases are by far the largest known food safety risk in the UK (contributing to around 450 deaths per annum), compared to the risks from TSEs (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies), chemical and radiological contamination, or food allergens which collectively contribute to around 25 deaths per annum (FSA, 2009). The five main foodborne disease pathogens affecting public health are Campylobacter, Salmonella, E.coli, Listeria and Clostridium perfringens.

[9]Paul Wilgos, January–June 2004.

clearly do very well out of it, I mean, these are the guys who are getting the highest incomes per hectare in the arable sector in British agriculture, so, you know, it's not difficult to see what sort of underpins that alliance.[10]

These criticisms are resented by many British farmers who argue that they are operating within an economic and political system over which they have little or no control. Here, for example is Matt Twidale, a Nottinghamshire beet farmer:

Some of the Oxfam people ... are using totally intemperate language. I mean "scam" and you know ... "daylight robbery" ... I mean, I'm not scamming anybody, but I have to live where I live and I have to ... abide by the rules that Tony Blair and Michael Howard and Ted Heath and all the politicians before them adopted for me. You know, we joined the EU and they all said it was a good thing to do, and we didn't, I didn't push to join the EU ... in order to receive three times the world price of sugar. I just ... do the job well, hope the products will allow me to make a profit and plant again for next year. So when somebody who has never grown a sugar beet and never done anything other than political mouthing all his life starts saying that I'm a scammer and a dumper and a rotten so-and so, I ought to be put out of business, I take it pretty badly I'll tell you. You don't know how that grates, you really don't.[11]

By contrast, chicken is much less heavily regulated, with retailers able to exert their buying power through retail-led "farm assurance" schemes and a bewildering range of food labelling systems. As a result, individual farmers feel that they are being squeezed by the retailers and that they suffer unfair competition from overseas producers who are perceived to be less heavily regulated and to exercise lower standards of animal husbandry. For example, Audrey Kley argues that: "Within the whole of the farming industry we have this gut feeling that we are being ripped off by the supermarkets" and that French farmers "ignore all the rules" while in Brazil and China chickens "have been fed on all the antibiotics in the world".[12]

In summary, the life history method (informed by the "cultural turn") gave us access to both public and private meanings of food and allowed us to draw out the commercial implications of these different narratives and discourses. The method was less appropriate for documenting broader changes in the political economy (though some of the interviews could be interpreted as a reaction to the process of agricultural intensification and some interviews shed light on the effects of recent changes in the regulatory environment). The approach also provided some insights into the complex materialities of chicken and sugar, where the distinction between sugar cane and sugar beet did not attract much comment compared, for example, to the crucial distinction between whole and processed chicken, where geo-

---

[10]Kevin Watkins, July 2004.
[11]Matt Twidale, March–May 2004.
[12]Audrey Kley, September 2003.

graphical provenance was considered relevant for the former but not for the latter.

3.2 "Doing" family

In this second empirical section, I want to argue that approaches informed by the "cultural turn" were useful in the *Changing Families, Changing Food* research programme in critiquing normative assumptions about "the family". For, as Marjorie DeVault has argued, "the family" is a falsely monolithic concept (De Vault, 1991:15). Currently, less than a third (27 %) of UK families are archetypal nuclear families (with husband, wife and dependent children living under the same roof), yet "the family" remains a powerful social ideal, underpinned by strong institutional structures and capable of exerting considerable moral force (National Statistics, 2007). As DeVault goes on to demonstrate, a "family" is not a naturally occurring collection of individuals; its reality is constructed from day to day through activities like eating together (De Vault, 1991:39). In our research programme, therefore, we took food as a lens through which to observe recent changes in family life while simultaneously adopting a practice-based definition of family life, approached via the everyday work of "doing family".

Much recent sociological work on consumption has taken a practice-based approach (Warde, 2005), showing how social structures like "the family" are reproduced through the endless repetition of routine activities, like cleaning and cooking. David Morgan (1996) emphasises the significance of "family practices" rather than the conventional approach to family as a structure to which people belong. For Morgan, "family" is better understood as an adjective (as in the phrase "family practices") rather than as a noun ("the family"). There is often, of course, a significant gap between idealised notions of family life and how family is performed in practice. Morgan insists that we should open up the "black box" of family life to examine the relationships that occur within families and the wider social networks of which they are a part. Morgan suggests that an analysis of the social practices involved in "feeding the family" (who prepares food for whom, on what occasions, where and when, and under what circumstances) is likely to reveal the fluidity of contemporary family relations as well as the durability of some family practices and structures. Like kinship in Finch and Mason's (2000) work, we propose that "family" should not be understood as a structure or system, but as constituted in relational practices, involving a wide range of participants, both kin and non-kin.

Our research demonstrated that "food choice" could not be reduced to individual decisions but needs to be understood through an exploration of the social and cultural embedding of domestic food practices. This represents a critical challenge to contemporary public policy in the UK which has placed considerable emphasis on individual responsibility and informed choice. A recent Department of Health

White Paper, for example, argues that "The opportunities are now opening up rapidly for everyone to make their own individual informed healthy choices which together will sustain and drive further the improvement in the health of the people of England" (DoH, 2004: Executive Summary 19). Placing responsibity on individual consumers ignores the structured inequalities that characterise modern British society and deflects blame from other (institutional) actors within the contemporary food system. This is particularly true in the UK where the four main supermarket chains (Asda-Walmart, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Safeway-Morrisons) wield a high degree of market power in a highly concentrated retail environment with over 70 % of grocery purchases made at the "big four" supermarkets (Cabinet Office, 2008).

An emphasis on individual choice is often also associated with a deficit model of social responsibility where problems in the current food system are blamed on a perceived lack of parenting or cooking skills. A tendency to "blame the victim" frequently results, as when low-income mothers are accused of making irrational and irresponsible choices in feeding their families. Their consumption "choices" may, in fact, be perfectly rational when viewed from a different perspective. In this case, food professionals and health advisors may continue to assert the dietary benefits of eating more fresh fruit and vegetables while some low-income mothers resist their advice, knowing that these "healthy choices" are likely to be wasted and that an equal amount of calories can be provided at lower cost and with less waste by offering their children less nutritious "convenience" food. So, for example, according to Tom Lobstein's research, reported in *The Guardian* (1 October 2008), 2 pence of frozen chips can provide the same calories as 51 pence of broccoli. A similar argument applies to well-intentioned advice on "healthy eating" that encourages families to eat asparagus or avocados when these foods are not readily available at affordable prices in all localities.

While approaches informed by the "cultural turn" may be less well-equipped to analyse the causes and consequences of the UK's high degree of retail concentration, they are highly appropriate for challenging the received wisdom in other areas of current public debate. For example, we have used oral history evidence to challenge the questionable assumptions that underpin the present debate about the decline of the family meal in Britain. There are no shortages of popular sources lamenting the perceived decline of the family meal and its demise is held responsible for any number of social ills. Here is just one example, from chef and food writer Richard Corrigan writing as part of a national newspaper campaign to save the Sunday lunch: "It's so important that we sit around the table with our families for a proper meal at least once a week... There's a reality in the saying that the family who eat together, stay together... Sunday is a very important day to me, and Sunday lunch is a big part of that – it's sacred" (*The Independent on Sunday* 11 June 2006). The journalist's language is highly moralised, with references to

"proper" meals and "sacred" Sundays forming an implicit contrast to the popular discourse of "junk" food and "convenience" meals. But recent evidence from time-diaries suggests that the overall amount of time families spend eating together each week has remained remarkably constantly over the last 30–40 yr, particularly if eating together outside the home is included (Cheng et al., 2007). A clear pattern of eating three meals a day is no longer as widespread as it was in the 1960s with family members engaging in less formal and more irregular eating practices. But there is little firm evidence of a generalised decline of family eating. Looking back at historical evidence from the Edwardian period confirms this impression, demonstrating that the "family meal" (with all family members eating together) was never a universal practice. While it may have been upheld as a middle-class ideal, eating practices and meal times have always varied by social class and geographical region, being fitted in around workplace demands (especially in the case of shift work) and social engagements (especially for the more well-off). Oral history evidence from the Edwardian period certainly contradicts simplistic assumptions about Sunday lunch as a "centuries-old tradition" now in rapid decline (Jonathan Thompson, *The Independent on Sunday* 5 March 2006). The extent to which public debate has proceeded in the absence of firm evidence suggests that we may be experiencing a contemporary "moral panic" (Cohen, 1972).

In this case, evidence derived from oral history research (informed by the "cultural turn") can be used to challenge the assumptions of journalists and other "moral entrepreneurs" to demonstrate how the popular discourse of decline has run ahead of the historical and sociological evidence. As in Stanley Cohen's original study of moral panics in post-war Britain, the identification of a "folk devil" (in this case working-class families with deficient cooking and parenting skills) serves as a convenient figure around which a moral panic can be articulated, deflecting attention from the underlying reasons for such apparently deviant behaviour.

4 Conclusion and future directions

This paper has sought to demonstrate that the "cultural turn" has enriched the study of human geography particularly in terms of our understanding of the politics of representation and the analysis of discourse. After a period that was dominated by abstract spatial analysis and what was often characterised as the totalising discourse of Marxian political-economy, the "cultural turn" led to a renewed emphasis on human agency and to a revival of interest in everyday social practice. My evaluation of the conceptual utility and methodological purchase of approaches informed by the "cultural turn" in relation to two recent research projects suggests that such approaches have some demonstrable strengths as well as some qualified limitations. Their strengths include an ability to address the politics of representation regarding the

individualisation of "food choice" and responsibility, discursive constructions of "the family" and debates about the perceived decline of the family meal. While these approaches are less well-equipped to analyse wider changes in the political economy, such as the intensification of agriculture, the globalisation of food supply chains or the process of retail concentration, our interviews and ethnographic data do shed light on the human consequences of these broad-scale changes. They are particularly appropriate for assessing the relationship between markets, meanings and materialities, where changing public perceptions of food have immediate commercial significance and direct consequences in terms of the governance and regulation of markets.

I have also attempted to demonstrate that approaches informed by the "cultural turn" have much to offer in terms of our understanding of the material world, as illustrated by my discussion of the complex materialities of chicken and sugar. We might agree, however, that other approaches are also necessary in order to transcend a purely constructionist approach to nature and to offer a better grasp of our place in a more-than-human world (FitzSimmons, 1989; Whatmore, 2006). These approaches would include studies informed by actor-network theory and the non-representational aspects of embodiment, emotion and affect.

The potential for this kind of work is demonstrated in Emma Roe's (2006) ethnographic observation of "things becoming food", charting the material and embodied practices of an organic food consumer, or by Stassart and Whatmore's (2003) analysis of the Belgian beef industry which pays close attention to the "stuff" of food and to enduring intimacies of human and non-human bodies. Finally, one could also point to Elsbeth Probyn's (2000) work for an analysis of the role of embodiment, emotion and affect in shaping human appetites (both culinary and sexual).

Regarding future directions, I am currently pursuing a research project on "Consumer Culture in an Age of Anxiety".[13] The project develops some of the ideas advanced in the "Food Stories" and "Changing Families" programmes, described above, addressing consumer anxieties about food at a range of geographical scales from the global scale of international food markets to the domestic scale of individual households. Whereas most research on food anxieties takes an *individualistic* approach (exploring the psychological causes of anorexia or bulimia, for example), my current research examines the *social* dimensions of consumer anxieties about food, asking why we, in the West, are anxious about food at the present time when food is probably safer to eat than ever before (Jackson and Everts, 2010). The project explores the effects of recent "food scares" like BSE ("mad cow disease") and farming crises like FMD (Food and Mouth Disease) in reducing consumer trust in food. It will examine

the need for a greater sense of "connection" between producers and consumers and the commercial response of the retail industry in seeking to restore consumer confidence in food. The new research continues to combine a political and moral economy perspective (Jackson et al., 2009), convinced that morality and markets are co-constitutive rather than mutually exclusive.

By venturing "beyond the cultural turn", I do not think we should infer that the "cultural turn" has run its course and exhausted its potential. In tracing the diverse historical roots of this intellectual movement and mapping its multiple routes through recent geographical research, the continued relevance of the "cultural turn" is all-too-apparent. We might, however, concede that such approaches now need to be supplemented with other perspectives that are more suited to understanding longer-term changes in political-economy, more attuned to understanding the significance of different materialities and better equipped to explore our place in a more-than-human world.

I would also encourage us to think more deeply about the concept of social practice. There is an unfortunate tendency to see practice as an oppositional term to narrative or discourse or social construction. That is not my view. As several papers at the conference demonstrated, discursive practices can be examined ethnographically and social constructions require material support in order to become effective in practice. An emphasis on practice in my own field of consumption research helps prevent us from reifying "the consumer" or from deploying ideological constructions uncritically such as "the consumer society". But the challenge is to find effective ways of combining an emphasis on practice with an analysis of discourse and an understanding of longer-term changes in the material environment.

Finally, I would encourage us to retain and develop a focus on the relationality of culture and economy in the conviction that commercial culture is a very productive field for investigation (Jackson, 2002). Such a focus raises a number of practical and ethical questions. My own work on culinary culture, for example, draws me in to a close and complex relationship with representatives of the food industry. This can involve difficult ethical issues (of getting "too close" to a company's commercial interests or the reverse, being perceived as hostile to the company's commercial interests, endangering the rapport that may have taken months to establish). But I have found this sometimes uncomfortable space a very productive one in terms of the generation of new ideas, challenging us as academics to confront our responsibilities towards different actors in the contemporary agri-food system. Ethical issues are often considered only at the beginning of a research project (in terms of negotiating access and securing informed consent) or at the end (in terms of publication and the ownership of copyright). I would urge us instead to accept the ethical challenges that occur throughout our research and to engage with them willingly rather than reluctantly. These are some to the most productive aspects of my current work on

consumer anxiety that I will be seeking to develop over the coming years.

Edited by: A. Pott

References

Barnett, C.: The cultural turn: fashion or progress in human geography?, Antipode, 30, 379–394, 1998.

Blacksell, M.: A future for cultural geography?, Area, 12, p. 105, 1980.

Cabinet Office: Food: an analysis of the issues, London, Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2008.

Cheng, S.-L., Olsen, W., Southerton, D., and Warde, A.: The changing practice of eating: evidence from UK time diaries, 1975 and 2000, Brit. J. Sociol., 58, 39–61, 2007.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. E. (Eds.): Writing cultures: the poetics and politics of ethnography, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986.

Cohen, S.: Folk devils and moral panics, London, McGibbon & Kee, 1972.

Cosgrove, D. E.: . . . then we take Berlin: cultural geography 1989–90, Prog. Hum. Geog., 14, 560–568, 1990.

De Vault, M. L.: Feeding the family: the social organization of caring as gendered work, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

DoH: Choosing health: making healthy choice easier, London, Stationery Office, (Cm 6374), 2004.

Finch, J. and Mason, J.: Passing it on: kinship and inheritance in England, London, Routledge, 2000.

FitzSimmons, M.: The matter of nature, Antipode, 21, 106–120, 1989.

Freidberg, S.: Editorial: Not all sweetness and light: new cultural geographies of food, Soc. Cult. Geogr., 4, 3–6, 2003.

FSA: Consultation on proposed FSA strategy for 2010 to 2015, London, Food Standards Agency, 2009.

Gregory, D. and Urry, J. (Eds.): Social relations and spatial structures, London, Macmillan, 1985.

Gregson, N.: And now it's all consumption? Prog. Hum. Geog., 19, 135–141, 1995.

Hall, S. and Henderson, J. (Eds.): Resistance through rituals, London, Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1976.

Harvey, D.: The condition of postmodernity, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989.

Hobsbawm, E.: Identity politics and the Left, New Left Rev., 217, 38–47, 1996.

Jackson, P.: Maps of meaning, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Jackson, P.: Rematerializing social and cultural geography, Soc. Cult. Geogr., 1, 9–14, 2000.

Jackson, P.: Commercial cultures: transcending the cultural and the economic, Prog. Hum. Geog., 26, 3–18, 2002.

Jackson, P. (Ed.): Changing families, changing food, Basingstoke, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009.

Jackson, P. and Everts, J.: Anxiety as social practice, Environ. Plann. A, 42, 2791–2806, 2010.

Jackson, P., Ward, N., and Russell, P.: Moral economies of food and geographies of responsibility, Transactions, Institute of British Geographers, 34, 12–24, 2009.

Lorimer, H.: Cultural geography: the busyness of being more-than-representational, Prog. Hum. Geog., 29, 83–94, 2005.

Morgan, D. H. J.: Family connections, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996.

Nash, C.: Cultural geography in crisis, Antipode, 34, 321–325, 2002.

National Statistics: Focus on families, edited by: Smallwood, S. and Wilson, B., Basingstoke, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007.

Naylor, S., Ryan, J., Cook, I., and Cruch, D. (Eds.): Cultural turns/geographical turns: perspectives on cultural geography, London, Pearson Education, 2000.

Oxfam: The great sugar scam, Oxford, Oxfam, 2002.

Palmer, B. D.: The descent into discourse: the reification of language and the writing of social history, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990.

Price, M. and Lewis, M.: The reinvention of cultural geography, Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr., 83, 1–17, 1993.

Probyn, E.: Carnal appetites: food sex identities, London, Routledge, 2000.

Rodriguez-Posé, A.: Killing economic geography with a "cultural turn" overdose, Antipode, 33, 176–182, 2001.

Roe, E. J.: Things becoming food and the embodied, material practices of an organic food consumer, Sociol. Ruralis, 46, 104–121, 2006.

Rowntree, L. B.: Orthodoxy and new directions: cultural/humanistic geography, Prog. Hum. Geog., 12, 575–586, 1988.

Soja, E.: Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory, London, Verso, 1989.

Stassart, P. and Wahtmore, S. J.: Metabolising risk: food scares and the un/re-making of Belgian beef, Environ. Plann. A, 35, 449–462, 2003.

Thrift, N. J.: Over-wordy worlds? Thoughts and worries, in: New words, new worlds, edited by: Philo, C., Lampeter, St David's University College, 144–148, 1991.

Ward, N., Jackson, P., Russell, P., and Wilkinson, K.: Productivism, post-productivism and European agricultural reform: the case of sugar, Sociol. Ruralis, 46, 118–132, 2008.

Warde, A.: Consumption and theories of practice, Journal of Consumer Culture, 5, 131–153, 2005.

Whatmore, S.: Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world, Cult. Geogr., 13, 600–609, 2006.