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Editorial



Dear EurSafe members,

The December issue of EurSafe News is dedicated to Ethical and Political Consumerism.

The thematic section opens with a discussion of the semiotics of food. Coff refers to the work of Peirce and Middelthun to explain how food can be understood as a sign of an ethical relationship. Especially, how the semiotic perspective, and specifically the triadic model "Supplier of food - food itself - receiver of food" can serve as a conceptual framework with the analytical power to disclose some of the 'hidden' and non-explicit meanings and values ascribed to food by different actors, and can provide insights on the ethical/political choices of consumers.

Next, Van den Belt develops the link between ethical/political consumerism and Corporate Social Responsibility. Van den Belt first refers to the work of Dewey & Tufts to highlight the danger for a race to the bottom in the absence of ethical consumer', as represented by a moral equivalent of Gresham's Law ('Bad money always drives out good money'). Then he also presents a critical view based on the work of Visser, who claims that the ethical consumer is actually the enemy of progress.

As is customary, the remaining of the newsletter is dedicated to information about board statements, conferences, and calls for funding.

The next issue will be on *Ethical decision-making tools*, edited by Kate Millar and her Nottingham team (Kate.Millar@nottingham.ac.uk). Please send all contributions by February 15, 2012.

All the best
Tassos Michalopoulos, issue-editor

Thematic Section

Dr Christian Coff,
University College Sealand,
Denmark

Ethical and Political Consumerism

Food Ethics in Everyday Life

Food is used daily to express ethical concerns in relations between people. But how does it work? Here I shall look into how semiotics can be used as a tool to analyse the role of food in ethical relationships in daily life.

1. Food as a sign of ethical relationship

We use food to express ourselves, to understand others, to convey our feelings, opinions, preferences, sense of belonging, ethical and political stands. For example, giving (good) food to somebody is widely interpreted as a sign of care for that person. The denial of food to somebody could be regarded, on the other hand, as a sign of ignorance. Food can be likened to a language: we use it to communicate about ourselves, our concerns and attitudes, our intentions, and so forth. A dinner can communicate a variety of meanings, such as 'we are in a hurry', 'I love you', 'I am tired of you', 'animal welfare is important to me', 'biotechnology is not dangerous', and so on.

2. Semiotics of food ethics

One definition of signs in Charles S. Peirce's work, is that a '*sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity*'.

Thus, we have three components in this understanding: something – sign – somebody. Middelthon describes the interaction between feeder and eater in Peirce's triadic model as: Supplier of food - food itself - receiver of food.

In this triadic model, the supplier(s) of food might be producers, retailers, catering outlets, parents, families, friends, or those in social roles, such as a host. The receiver(s) of food might be friends, families, colleagues, customers or patients. This model can also be thought of as depicting a way of relating to oneself, as an I incorporating food into a me, as Middelthon puts it, in which the supplier and receiver are the same person, but stand for different sides or identities of that person.

3. Everyday life food ethics

In everyday life food is closely embedded in traditions, routines, habits, and social norms, which are largely taken for granted and which are, therefore, less obvious for the purposes of analysis. As a conceptual framework, the triadic model owes its analytical power to its ability to disclose some of the 'hidden' and non-explicit meanings and values ascribed to food by actors interacting with each other – for example, as suppliers and receivers of food.

Does this then have implications on how we can study food ethics and ethical consumption? In my view the semiotic perspective, when food is seen as a sign of something else, can expand the field of possible ethical concerns that one considers and thus widen the study and understanding of food ethics and ethical consumption. Seeing food as sign may for instance draw the attention to conflicting concerns around food ethics as the same food may have different

meanings to different people. To give but one example of this: Asian King Prawns are tasty and delicious, and they can be seen as a sign of affection and care when served for dinner. If, however, the receiver associates these prawns with environmental degradation and the exploitation of poor workers, then he/she may regard the food in a negative fashion. The supplier of food, the one who wants to make a delicious dinner, wishes to send a sign of care, but due to the different values associated with the very same foodstuff, the communication of that particular signification may fail. The number of cases is endless and this is just one to illustrate that food ethics and ethical consumption may have many faces: Shopping for Asian King Prawns may be a sign of care and ethical concern by some people, however, for what we call the 'informed ethical consumer' it is likely to be perceived as the opposite.

References

Peirce, C. S., *Collected Papers*. Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1958.
Middelthun, A-L.: 'The duty to feed and eat right', *Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica*, 27-28, 2009, 209-225.

The article is a short version of Coff, C.: 'Signs and Traces of Food Ethics in Everyday Life'. To be published in the proceedings from the 18th International Ethnological Food Research Conference 2010.

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Ethical consumerism

Ethical consumerism has been a major trend for over a decade now. It can be seen as a welcome complement, even a necessary underpinning, for endeavours in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on the part of companies. Working in tandem, both can contribute to a better, more equitable and more sustainable world. Without consumers who are concerned about environmental degradation, animal welfare, violations of human rights and labour exploitation and, very importantly, who are also willing to take such issues into account while purchasing goods and services, there would hardly be room on the market for companies that conduct their business in an ethically responsible way. In other words, without 'ethical consumers' the danger of a race to the bottom looms very large. More than 100 years ago, in their book *Ethics* (1908), the American philosophers John Dewey and James Tufts described this phenomenon in graphic terms. Any entrepreneur who followed the dictates of his conscience and paid his employees a decent wage, they argued, would irrevocably be punished by the merciless discipline of the market: "A merchant may desire to pay his women clerks wages on which they can support life without selling their souls. But if his rival across the street pays only half the wage necessary for subsistence, it is evident the former is so far at a disadvantage." (p. 517-518). On the market, therefore, reigned the moral equivalent of *Gresham's Law* ('Bad money always drives out good money'): "[W]ith the changes that have come in business conditions the worse practices, like a baser coinage, tend to drive out the morally better" (p. 517). Thus a clothing factory that offered good labour conditions would inevitably lose out against the sweatshops (p. 518).

Dewey and Tufts held that the individual is powerless against this unstoppable race to the bottom. It would not help to address company directors personally and appeal to their sense of social responsibility. Remarkably, Dewey and Tufts did not think of ethical consumerism as a possible remedy either. The only effective solution they saw at the time was the heavy hand of government regulation.

The emergence of ethical consumerism and the concomitant rise of CSR as a mainstream trend in the business world in the 1990s are closely linked, I think, with the drastically diminished faith in government regulation during the heyday of neo-liberalism. Power seemed to have shifted from governments to multinational corporations. It was logical, therefore, for civil-society organizations to address their social and environmental demands to these new power holders rather than to national governments. NGOs also found out that they could put pressure on companies like Nike or Shell by mobilizing the power of consumers with well-targeted “naming and shaming” campaigns that exploited the vulnerability of the companies’ brands and reputations. Companies responded by inaugurating more effective and proactive CSR policies, thereby regaining the initiative from NGOs. Ordinary people, finally, thought they could have more influence on the affairs of the world as consumers making purchasing decisions in the market-place than as citizens casting their votes in the ballot box.

After the experiences of the last couple of years, however, I think we should ask ourselves whether we sincerely believe that, as consumers, we can shop our way towards a better world, helped by the CSR policies of enlightened business executives. There are definite limits to ethical consumerism. Surveys invariably show high percentages of consumers stating preferences for socially equitable, sustainable and animal-friendly products, but there is of course the well-known gap between saying and doing. Undoubtedly, there is a large element of social desirability bias in the response patterns. And even if consumers have a genuine preference for ethically responsible products over their ‘normal’ counterparts, this preference may not be so strong as to overcome the price premiums that the former command. The upshot is that these products represent no more than a relatively marginal niche segment in the retail market, making up less than 10% of the total. In his recent book *The Age of Responsibility* (2011), business ethicist Wayne Visser even goes so far as to claim that the ethical consumer is actually the enemy of progress: “[B]y creating a premium-priced niche market for ‘ethical consumption’ (whether it be organic, fair-trade or eco-friendly), companies have been able to present a responsible front to the world, while leaving the vast majority of their products – which are, by implication, less than ethical – unquestioned and unchanged” (p. 199). Visser’s overall judgment on the track record of CSR policies is hardly less devastating: “[B]y all accounts, capitalism is failing spectacularly to control the environmental impacts of the economic activities that it is so successful at stimulating” (p. 10). He advocates a completely new form of corporate responsibility, called radical or systemic CSR or CSR 2.0, to face our global challenges. Incidentally, this new form of CSR makes ethical consumerism irrelevant, as CSR 2.0 companies would attempt to ‘mainstream’ ethically responsible products and no longer offer ‘less ethical’ product ranges.

So, if there is to be a new form of CSR, it will no longer need the strategic support of ethical consumerism in the market-place. I am however not so sure that we should pin our hopes for the future on CSR 2.0, despite Visser’s enthusiastic pleas. The alternative would be to fall back on the position of Dewey and Tufts. They argued that citizens should not hesitate to bring “the moral consciousness

embodied in an impersonal agency, the law” (p. 521) to bear on corporations which themselves, as anonymous economic organizations, are not likely to follow moral considerations in their relentless pursuit of profit. However, this alternative remedy presupposes that we are able to regain the lost political awareness of critical citizenship beyond the facile illusions of ethical consumerism.

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References

John Dewey & James Hayden Tufts (1908), *Ethics*, New York: Henry Holt and Company
Wayne Visser (2011), *The Age of Responsibility: CSR 2.0 and the New DNA of Business*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

EurSafe Executive Committee Update

EurSafe 2012

Welcome to the final issue of the EurSafe 2011 Newsletter. The EurSafe Board is happy to inform you that the organisers of the 10th Congress are well on track. The last months they received a substantial number of interesting abstracts, which is some of the many signals that it will be a very interesting conference. We hope we will meet many of you in Tübingen, Germany, 30th May – 2nd June 2012 (www.eursafe2012.eu).

New activities

Recognising the importance of international links for the future development and sustainability of EurSafe, the Board has started to liaise with a number of contacts in Asian countries. The aim of this activity is to explore the possibility of arranging a Conference on Agricultural and Food Ethics in Asia over the coming 3 years and to assess the feasibility of founding a sister organisation to EurSafe in Asia. An initial scoping meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 2nd December 2011 in the office of UNESCO Asia. The President and Vice-president of EurSafe were present along with a small group of interested parties from the region. Further news on this initiative will be presented to the society in 2012.

Board meetings

During the last months the Board had one of its regular conference calls, in which the progress of the 10th conferences has been discussed, but also EurSafe finances, the strategy on institutional membership and first ideas on the next conference were on the agenda. The next conference calls is scheduled for 19 January 2012. If you wish to comment on current activities, raise an issue or propose new activities, etc, please do not hesitate to contact me as Secretary (F.L.B.Meijboom@uu.nl).

Conferences 2012

January 4 - 6	<p>EGI Evolution & Ecology Student Conference Oxford, United Kingdom http://www.zoo.ox.ac.uk/egi/newsevents/EGI2012_Information_sheet.pdf</p>
February 8	<p>Feeding the World: The 9 Billion People Question Geneva, Switzerland http://cemea.economistconferences.com/event/feeding-world</p>
February 10	<p>Konferenz ethische Textilien Stuttgart, Germany http://www.oeko-fair.de/index.php/cat/15/cid/89/title/Konferenz_ethische_Textilien</p>
February 14-17	<p>14th Advanced Bioethics Course 'Suffering, Death and Palliative Care' Nijmegen, Netherlands http://med.kuleuven.be/Faculteit_Geneeskunde/english/borders/erasmus-mundus-bioethics/sufferingdeath</p>
February 15-19	<p>International Food and Agricultural Congress Antalya, Turkey http://www.tarimvegidakongresi.org</p>
February 19-23	<p>GRF One Health Summit 2012: One Health - One Planet - One Future Davos, Switzerland http://onehealth.grforum.org</p>
February 27-March 2	<p>Therapie und Person, wissenschaftliche Klausurwoche München, Germany www.ttn-institut.de/therapieundperson</p>
March 1-3	<p>Religions, Science, and Technology in Cultural Contexts: Dynamics of Change Trondheim, Norway http://www.ntnu.no/iar/konferanser/reisci</p>
March 9-10	<p>Positioning Interdisciplinarity Nancy, France http://idea-udl.org/positioning-interdisciplinarity/</p>
March 28-30	<p>8th South-East European Congress and Exhibition on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Sofia, Bulgaria http://www.eeandres.viaexpo.com/en/congress</p>
May 7 - 11	<p>6th World Fisheries Congress Edinburgh, UK http://www.6thwfc2012.com/</p>
May 13-18	<p>World Congress on Water, Climate & Energy 2012 Dublin, Ireland http://www.iwa-wcedublin.org</p>
April 12-15	<p>Fair handeln - Internationale Messe für Fair Trade und global verantwortungsvolles Handeln Stuttgart, Germany http://www.messe-stuttgart.de/cms/fair12_messe.0.html</p>

May 30 – June 2	EurSafe 2012 Tübingen, Germany www.eursafe2012.eu
July 1-7	Minding Animals Conference Utrecht University, The Netherlands www.mindinganimals.com
July 13-20	International Conference on Mass Data Analysis of Images and Signals Berlin, Germany http://www.mda-signals.de
August 2-5	ICSA VII. World Congress: Brave New World? Genetic Engineering & Human Dignity Pasadena, California, United States http://www.JIS3.org/icsavii.htm
September 20-21	Kantian Ethics and Moral Life Antwerp, Belgium http://ugent.academia.edu/StijnVanImpe/Blog/16809/International-conference-KANTIAN-ETHICS-AND-MORAL-LIFE

Funding: FP7 Calls

IDEAS

ERC Advanced Investigators Grant

Theme(s): ERC. Specific Programme(s): IDEAS

Identifier: ERC-2012-ADG_20120411

Deadline: 11 April 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/ideas?callIdentifier=ERC-2012-ADG_20120411

ERC Advanced Investigators Grant

Theme(s): ERC. Specific Programme(s): IDEAS

Identifier: ERC-2012-ADG_20120314

Deadline: 14 March 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/ideas?callIdentifier=ERC-2012-ADG_20120314

ERC Advanced Investigators Grant

Theme(s): ERC. Specific Programme(s): IDEAS

Identifier: ERC-2012-ADG_20120216

Deadline: 16 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/ideas?callIdentifier=ERC-2012-ADG_20120216

Call for proposals for ERC Synergy Grant

Theme(s): ERC. Specific Programme(s): IDEAS

Identifier: ERC-2012-SyG

Deadline: 25 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/ideas?callIdentifier=ERC-2012-SyG>

Gender aspects in career structures and career paths

Theme(s): ERC. Specific Programme(s): IDEAS

Identifier: ERC-2012-Support-1

Deadline: 12 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/ideas?callIdentifier=ERC-2012-Support-1>

CAPACITIES

Theme(s): Support for the coherent development of research policies.

Specific Programme(s): CAPACITIES

Support to trans-national networks of procurers

Identifier: FP7-COH-2012-Procurers

Deadline: 05 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/capacities?callIdentifier=FP7-COH-2012-Procurers>

Integration of research entities from the EU's Convergence and Outermost regions in the ERA and enhancement of their innovation potential

Theme(s): Research Potential

Identifier: FP7-REGPOT-2012-2013-1

Deadline: 03 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/capacities?callIdentifier=FP7-REGPOT-2012-2013-1>

Transnational cooperation between regional research-driven clusters

Theme(s): Regions of Knowledge

Identifier: FP7-REGIONS-2012-2013-1

Deadline: 31 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/capacities?callIdentifier=FP7-REGIONS-2012-2013-1>

FP7-SCIENCE-IN-SOCIETY-2012

Theme(s): Science in Society

Identifier: FP7-SCIENCE-IN-SOCIETY-2012-1

Deadline: 22 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/capacities?callIdentifier=FP7-SCIENCE-IN-SOCIETY-2012-1>

PEOPLE

MARIE CURIE CAREER INTEGRATION GRANTS (CIG)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-CIG

Final Deadline: 18 September 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time).

Intermediate Deadline(s): 06 March 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-CIG>

MARIE CURIE INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS (IAPP)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IAPP

Deadline: 19 April 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IAPP>

MARIE CURIE CO-FUNDING OF REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES (COFUND)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE
Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-COFUND

Deadline: 15 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-COFUND>

Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (IRSES)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE
Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IRSES

Deadline: 18 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IRSES>

RESEARCHERS' NIGHT (NIGHT)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE
Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-NIGHT

Deadline: 10 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-NIGHT>

Marie Curie Initial Training Networks 2012 (ITN)

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-ITN

Deadline: 12 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-ITN>

Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (IRSES)

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IRSES

Deadline: 18 January 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IRSES>

COOPERATION

ERA-NET Call 2012

Theme(s): Socio-economic sciences and Humanities ; Transport (including Aeronautics) ; General Activities ; Energy ; Health ; Nanosciences, Nanotechnologies, Materials and new Production Technologies - NMP ; Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology

Identifier: FP7-ERANET-2012-RTD

Deadline: 28 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

Additional information: A Pre-Proposal Check (PPC) service is available and will remain open until 27 January 2012.

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/cooperation?callIdentifier=FP7-ERANET-2012-RTD>

FP7-SSH-2012 - Collaborative projects (Large scale integrated research projects)

Theme(s): Socio-economic sciences and Humanities. Specific Programme(s): COOPERATION

Identifier: FP7-SSH-2012-1

Deadline: 02 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/cooperation?callIdentifier=FP7-SSH-2012-1>

FP7-SSH-2012 - Collaborative Projects (Small or medium-scale focused research projects) as well as Coordination and Support Actions

Theme(s): Socio-economic sciences and Humanities. Specific

Programme(s): COOPERATION

Identifier: FP7-SSH-2012-2

Deadline: 02 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/cooperation?callIdentifier=FP7-SSH-2012-2>

ENVIRONMENT 2012: TWO-STAGE

Theme(s): Environment (including Climate Change)

Identifier: FP7-ENV-2012-two-stage

Deadline: 20 October 2011 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time). 15 February 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time) - 2nd deadline (for 2-stage procedure)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/cooperation?callIdentifier=FP7-ENV-2012-two-stage>

Energy Call Part 2

Theme(s): Energy

Identifier: FP7-ENERGY-2012-2

Deadline: 08 March 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/cooperation?callIdentifier=FP7-ENERGY-2012-2>

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News

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Editors and themes next issues

March 2012 Kate Millar: "Ethical decision-making tools"

Deadline for the next issue: February 15, 2012

You are kindly invited to send any relevant contributions, conference calls, publication reviews, etc. to the editors.