



Organic intimacy: emotional practices at an organic store

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Abstract

The article tells the story of the rise and fall of the organic store Yggdrasill in Iceland. That story features humble founders, caring customers, dedicated staff, as well as anonymous investment funds, and it describes the conversion of organics from a niche market to mainstream consumption. Through an ethnographic account of everyday life at the organic store, the article analyzes how intimacy within the modern food chain is established through emotional practices. Staff and customers share feelings of reciprocity, not only towards organic producers, but also towards each other through acts of selling and buying organic products, forming intimate attachment and creating trust to counter the fears and anonymity of the modern food chain. Drawing on theories of affect and emotional practices and combining ethnography with narrative analysis, the article explores the role of emotions and how the doing of emotions makes organic food consumption meaningful within the industrial food system.

Keywords Organic food · Ethnography · Emotions · Intimacy · Affects · Consumption · Narrative · Retail · Rhythm · Emotional labor

Introduction

A woman entered the store and bought organic butter, among other organic products. She put the items on the counter and I started to slide them through the scanner. Halfway through, she asked in a hushed voice, “Organic butter is healthier, isn’t it?” Judging by the pleading look and the tone of the question, I understood she wanted me to offer her assurance that, yes, she was doing the right thing. All I could reply was, “At least it’s not less healthy,” hopefully salvaging some semblance of integrity.

This scene of doubt and hesitation took place at the organic store Yggdrasill in downtown Reykjavík, in Iceland. Yggdrasill brought all sorts of people together: senior citizens seeking longevity, sustainably-minded students, women in fur coats who could afford the price of organic, and tourists on the hunt for bottled water and Icelandic herbs. Organic producers also dropped by regularly to deliver fresh produce, chat with the staff, and buy products for themselves and their families. Being an organic hub, Yggdrasill had

many regular customers who were wholeheartedly committed to organic production and consumption.

In recent decades, the relationship between food producers and consumers has been much debated. The dim view taken by the media finds support in the writings of various scholars who claim that we live in an era characterized by the death of longstanding social attachments (Bauman 2000; Putnam 2000). This disconnect may also be glossed as a loss of intimacy. Consumer confidence has plummeted while mistrust has proliferated, fueled by serial food scandals that shake the public faith in modern food production (Bánáti 2011; Berg 2004). These scandals highlight the vulnerability of consumers, who in turn have increasingly sought out information to educate themselves about the environmental, health, political and social implications of food production, distribution and consumption (Atkins and Bowler 2001; Nerlich 2004; Roos et al. 2007).

In the aftermath of food scares, with a steady stream of information, and heightened awareness among consumers, alternative food spaces and movements have risen to prominence to support certain ways of producing and consuming food (Goodman and Goodman 2009; Kneafsey et al. 2008). This includes farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), local and organic food, the Slow Food movement, and Fair Trade. Although different, these movements

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and food spaces all aim to mend the broken chain by establishing or reestablishing bonds between producers and consumers. Key to this process is transparency, which must be in place to build trust.

It has been argued that unclocking the modern food system by increasing transparency does not always simplify the process of choosing food to consume. On the contrary, to be able to act on their values, informed consumers must devote time, energy and money to the cause (Goodman et al. 2010; Johnston et al. 2009; Pétursson 2013; Roos et al. 2007). In providing transparency, food producers, companies and retail stores have increasingly turned to storytelling in the hope of regaining the trust and loyalty of consumers (Bryant and Goodman 2004; Fog et al. 2010; Larsen and Österlund-Pötzsch 2015; Pétursson 2013).

Food stories are built on a narrative plot and feature protagonists that consuming readers can follow and with whom they can empathize. The plot highlights values that food companies advocate and consumers embody. Transparency is a story that connects different actors within the global food chain and the thickness of the plot and the richness of the characters determine how digestible it is for consumers in their daily shopping.

Previous research has established that consumer interest in organic food is closely related to notions of health and taste (Fernqvist and Ekelund 2013, 2014; Hughner et al. 2007), environmental and social issues, as well as animal rights (Aertsens et al. 2009). Buying organic products is therefore a part of ethical consumption practices that turn moral values into meaningful engagement with the production and consumption of food. A majority of people still buy their food in retail stores, which makes them the most common places for producers and consumers to “meet”. In specialty stores like Yggdrasill, organic producers were represented through images and narratives, and by the staff and store itself. Organic retail stores such as Yggdrasill thus make good field sites to explore how people put their food values into practice on an everyday basis.

At Yggdrasill, customers slowly pushed earthy, dark-green shopping carts between aisles, and at the counter they shared small talk with the staff who packed the groceries. The connection between people and products distinguished the organic specialty store from most other grocery stores in Reykjavík, and its employees were expected to provide better and more detailed service than the average supermarket. In many ways, Yggdrasill was an “alternative” shopping space in contrast to “mainstream” retail spaces, regarding its ideas, practices and products. Being “something else” was important in bringing customers and staff at Yggdrasill together. Committed and emotionally driven customers illustrated that shopping at Yggdrasill was not only about obtaining basic nourishment, but sharing food values and experiencing a feeling of belonging.

Numerous affect theorists have conceptualized emotions, but, as has been pointed out, their insights are rarely glimpsed through empirical investigations into everyday life (Frykman and Frykman 2016; Löfgren 2014). Such theorization is often de-contextualized and thus lacks explanatory power in terms of understanding how emotions come into being and negotiate everyday situations. Even so, the insights gleaned from this scholarship are valuable for investigating how people use and express emotions in concrete social situations. Sara Ahmed, for instance, conceives of emotions as being “about the intimate relationship between selves, objects, and others” (Ahmed 2004, p. 28). Building on Ahmed’s thought, I develop the concept of “organic intimacy,” with reference to communications, rhythms, bodily gestures and sensory experiences in the meeting of producers, consumers, staff and organic products at Yggdrasill.

In her discussion of “emotional practices,” Monique Scheer suggests that viewing “emotions as practices means understanding them as emerging from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity” (Scheer 2012, p. 193). Emotional practices highlight that emotions are something that people *do* rather than something people just have (Solomon 2007). Doing emotions therefore depends both on cognitive reflection and bodily movements in concrete everyday situations. Implicit in the definition of emotion-as-practice is “speaking, gesturing, remembering, manipulating objects, and perceiving sounds, smells, and spaces” (Scheer 2012, p. 209). This practice-oriented approach to emotions builds a bridge over to ethnographic accounts of meaning-making, entanglements and negotiations that take place within specific cultural settings.

I suggest that shopping and selling organic food in Yggdrasill involves emotional practices performed by customers and staff. These emotional practices at Yggdrasill refer to a “nexus of doings and sayings” (Schatzki 1996, p. 89) that simultaneously describes and determines people’s engagement with the production and consumption of food. How were emotional practices of shopping and selling organic food carried out at the cozy organic store? What can feelings of love and affection, trust and gratitude, anger and anxiety, doubt and disappointment tell us about the relationships between customers, staff, and producers at the organic store, and by extension the modern food chain?

To answer these questions I analyze emotional practices at Yggdrasill through the categories of narrative, time, rhythm, purity, size and space. I start by entering Yggdrasill, presenting the fieldwork and broaching the methodological problem of intimacy when trying to serve two lovers: science and the shop. Then I explore what role narratives played in the construction of the organic store as an alternative space of consumption. From narratives the argument moves forward through “organic” conceptualizations of time

and rhythm. Then I discuss how organic aesthetics and business can clash through purity and size before analyzing the creation of Yggdrasill as an organic space. Finally, I turn to the labor of love and the part it played in establishing relationships at Yggdrasill.

This is the story of the rise and fall of the organic store Yggdrasill from 1986 to 2012. It features humble founders, caring customers, dedicated staff, as well as anonymous investment funds. Furthermore, it describes the conversion of organics from a niche market to mainstream consumption in Iceland.

Creating intimacy: notes on methodology

When I began my fieldwork in February 2010, Yggdrasill was centrally located in Reykjavík, on Skólavörðustígur street. Apples were one of Yggdrasill's main attractions, and when the weather was good these apples were put on display outside to lure customers in through the door. Apart from the fresh fruit at the storefront, colorful organic products could be seen in the big shop windows, inviting people to step inside. The space on the ground floor was limited but used efficiently. Organic products covered the walls, were neatly aligned on shelves, as well as filling two freestanding racks that created narrow aisles. Usually the atmosphere was relaxed and there were not many people in the store.

I started out by interviewing Ari, the manager of Yggdrasill. As we wrapped things up I asked him whether I could show up from time to time to assist in the store and do some fieldwork. I interrupted the short silence that followed as Ari contemplated the proposal to tell him that this would be done in the name of science and at no cost to the company. That sealed the deal. After this smooth negotiation, I began to come by once or twice a week for a couple of hours at a time. I shadowed both staff and customers and engaged in conversations about organic food, taking notes continuously in a field diary during my time at the store. Gradually, I came to participate more in the daily routines in the store. I stocked shelves with products and worked the register. In that sense, I became increasingly engaged in the cultural practices I was there to observe. Commenting on ethnographic fieldwork, Paul Rabinow has emphasized the dialectical nature between participation and observation. He states that participation influences the observation that in return changes the nature of participation (Rabinow 1977, pp. 79–80). Working the register, for example, was often a conversation starter that provided valuable insights into how customers reasoned about the production and consumption of organic food while buying organic products.

When the store moved to a bigger location at Rauðarárstígur in June 2010, I was hired as a paid employee for 2 months, spending almost 200 h at the store.

While working, I came to hear things and gain access to the field that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to gain otherwise. This included the communication between staff and customers, but also what went on behind the scenes, such as the various maneuvers of the owners and staff in managing the company. The manager and other co-workers showed me the ropes and I was trained to become one of the team. This scenario brought me closer to the people in the field.

When speaking of specific encounters with people in the store, the customers remain anonymous. In addition to participant observation, I build on nine in-depth interviews that I conducted with customers, co-workers and other business owners between 2010 and 2012. I also build on a follow-up interview conducted in the spring 2017 with Oddný who has occupied several positions within the organic sector in Iceland between 2010 and 2017. The interviews were conducted in Icelandic, and were then recorded and transcribed verbatim. I started out with some general questions on the topic of organic food but granted my interviewees certain freedom to direct the conversation towards what they felt was closest to their heart regarding the issue. Informed consent was obtained from the informants orally and they gave their permission to be quoted by name. However, I will only refer to my informants by their first name. Knowing many within the organic circle, especially regulars at the store, Ari was helpful in introducing me to people whom I would later interview.

As a staff member, I had to be able to provide extensive information about organic production and explain why organic food was the right kind of food. To cut a long story short: I found that hard to do. To begin with, I did not possess this knowledge in intricate detail, but much of what I had read also did not convince me about the supposed superiority of organic production methods and organic food. On the one hand, I wanted to safeguard my scientific and personal integrity, but on the other hand, I felt like I could not just tell customers who were seeking my assistance to shop elsewhere. To gain trust within the field of academia, one has to problematize things, but when speaking to customers in Yggdrasill, clear-cut answers were expected.

Being both a researcher and a staff member at Yggdrasill illustrates the ethical dilemma of my ethnographic research (Cherry et al. 2011; Jönsson 2012). I was there to gain information, as a researcher, but also to provide information, as a staff member. I had to negotiate between these two contexts. I was stuck in-between, navigating between my loyalty to the company I worked for, to customers who wanted me to offer assurance that organic butter was healthier than non-organic, and my own analysis of how all these threads of organic production and consumption came together at Yggdrasill.

Building relationships through stories

Yggdrasill was founded in 1986 by a couple, Hildur and Rúnar, in co-operation with a handful of Icelandic organic farmers. The company began its life in a small storage space in the apartment building where Hildur and Rúnar lived. The few who knew about the enterprise dropped by when they needed something. Two years after opening, the founders moved the store to Kárástígur, an out-of-the-way location in downtown Reykjavík. Rúnar says that even though they had formally opened, it was a part-time job the first year and they only kept the store open for 3 days a week (Interview with Rúnar 2011). Rúnar and Hildur were therefore the sole employees, as well as owners, and five years passed before they finally could hire another person.

In running a wholesale company, Rúnar and Hildur also tried to convince conventional stores to sell organic products,

In the beginning, this was considered weird. There were not many who understood. I often tell this story that I called Hagkaup [a major supermarket chain], after running the company for ten years... Then I call Hagkaup and talk to the product manager and say that I have organic products and organic baby food that would be good to offer parents. The answer was that organic food was just for hippies who lived downtown, didn't have a car, and never set foot in a supermarket (Interview with Rúnar 2011).

This was before the turn of the millennium and supermarkets were still hesitant to take a chance on organics. Later Rúnar mentioned that they had always been firm on the point of selling only organic products in Yggdrasill, believing that organics would grow. He was right. Only a couple of years later, starting around 2000, almost every supermarket in the country wanted to set up special sections with organic food. Rúnar and Hildur helped many of them to do so, stocking them with products from their wholesale company.

It is worth noting that Rúnar has often told this story. The narrative describes how believing in organic values slowly paid off as sales gradually increased. The popularity of organic food justifies the vision. In that sense, it is a moral tale of doing the right thing and finally being rewarded. The resistance they met from the conventional food sector is an important component in the narrative of alternative consumption.

The story of the store's humble beginning and slow growth was frequently referred to in my interviews and in conversations between customers and staff during my time in Yggdrasill. Many whom I spoke with had known Rúnar and Hildur for a long time and expressed gratitude towards

them for pursuing their vision and not giving up despite the difficulties they faced at the beginning. The origin story of Yggdrasill clearly spoke to customers and staff in the store. Retelling this story was a part of daily shopping activities, allowing customers and staff to become a part of the success story that made selling and buying organic food meaningful. In that sense, narrating the past was a powerful emotional practice in the present. Furthermore, referring to the store's past made both organic production and consumption meaningful in the present.

Organic production and consumption had grown considerably in Iceland by 2010 and customers and staff in Yggdrasill were delighted with the increased selection of organic products, especially vegetables from domestic producers. Organic, Icelandic cherry tomatoes were a continuous source of joy. While holding a box of such tomatoes in the store, customers recounted visits to the growers; walking through their greenhouses, chatting and purchasing tomatoes fresh off the branch. This is what Svala said when I asked her how it felt to enter a greenhouse,

It was just glorious! It was really nice! There was one [person] pottering around picking the tomatoes. I went to Akur. The people who run it, although being organic is more work for them, they can't imagine changing over to more factory-like production. They just can't imagine doing that, even though they would make more money out of it (Interview with Svala 2011).

Svala was clearly happy that the growers at Akur do not succumb to greed, sticking instead to their organic values and she wanted to support them as well as she could by buying their tomatoes. Such narratives illustrate intimate connections between producers and consumers, based on shared organic values and vision for the future.

Rúnar also highlights the connection between the business of selling organic food and the vision of growing organic food. Rúnar got to know many of his best friends in Iceland and abroad through Yggdrasill. Rúnar and Hildur met many of these friends when they went to organic fairs abroad. They kept in touch through the years and even went on vacations together,

There is somehow a different atmosphere in this branch, in this business, than in many other things. Different connections are made, it's not only business, it involves more than money... growing organic is a vision (Interview with Rúnar 2010).

This kind of intimacy overrides the anonymity of capital and creates bonds that last. The vision-over-profit mentality created the special atmosphere within the organic branch to which Rúnar referred. But things were about to change. When in charge of Yggdrasill, Rúnar and Hildur annually attended Biofach, the biggest organic fair in the

world in Nürnberg, Germany. First held in 1990 (<http://www.biofach.de/en>), this is the who's who of the organic world. Rúnar noted that after the millennium shift, people in Armani suits began to show up at the fair, a novelty at the time. Investors and big companies had smelled money; according to Rúnar, that was all they cared about (Interview with Rúnar 2010).

The introduction of investment funds and big companies is perhaps ironic considering the history of organics in recent decades. The increase in organic production and consumption in the West can be traced to the radicalism and counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s. The hippies threw off the industrial-capitalist yoke of their parents and many chose to go “back to nature.” Natural and organic food was for many back then an answer to the impersonal mass production of food in the modern era (Belasco 1989, 2005).

As these ideas proliferated, demand for organic and natural food grew. Food unspoiled by human hands (through pesticides and artificial fertilizers) and their mechanical extensions grew in popularity. Joni Mitchell expressed this Zeitgeist in her song *Big Yellow Taxi* from 1970, “Hey farmer, farmer, put away that DDT now. Give me spots on my apples but leave me the birds and the bees. Please!” (Mitchell 1970). In a similar vein, the image of organic production and consumption is in many ways still shaped by ideas of a naturalness that is constantly under siege from industrial food production and modern commerce, embodied by the genetically modified food Goliath Monsanto. The idea that “natural” food is both safer and tastier was sown against the backdrop of artificial taste and polluted food. The counter-culture movement was highly critical of the capitalist economy and by going back to nature and producing their own food, people protested consumerism (Belasco 1989, 2005).

Today, many consumers are using their buying power to effect change by fighting the industrial food system. This approach to the various ills of modern food production is part of the growing trend of “ethical consumption,” that highlights the common interests and mutual benefits of producers, middlemen and consumers (for further discussion of ethical consumption see Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee 2012). In return, businesses increasingly emphasize their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to attract consumers. As the name suggests, CSR credits companies with responsibility and narrates their engagement in social activities that might, at least at first glance, be understood as going beyond the immediate interests of the companies (McWilliams et al. 2006). CSR gives companies symbolic capital beyond pure economic means, which in turn breeds trust and strengthens their relationships with consumers. But in showing that they take responsibility seriously, companies need to tell their story.

Similar to the origin story of Yggdrasil, such storytelling has become a successful method for organic companies to showcase the benefits of organic production and consumption. These stories often include: the modest beginning, the slow growth of the company, the stories of the farmers, and the organic vision of the founders which the company still honors even though it has been bought up by a big corporation (see <http://www.earthsbest.com>). The moving stories quell the fear of the anonymous food system by giving the impression of transparency, bringing forward the faces and places vital to establishing trust between producers and consumers. In that way, consumers are invited to become part of the story, and to embody specific food values through consumption. The personification of the food value chain thus brings forward the food producers, but increasingly also the founders and owners of companies (Pétursson 2013).

In 2008, 2 years before I began working the register, Rúnar and Hildur sold Yggdrasil to an investment fund called Arev NI. The main reason they sold the company was that they were tired. They had barely taken a vacation in over a decade, and almost always worked weekends. When the time was ripe and investment funds showed interest in organics, they opted out. This was the tell-tale sign that the tide had turned. Organics were headed for the mainstream, the “Armanification” of the organic sector of which Rúnar spoke. Even if they lamented the intrusion of investors, for whom profit mattered at least as much as vision, Rúnar and Hildur took part in facilitating it. Not only did they sell the store, Rúnar and Hildur were also influential in introducing organic food to supermarkets, thus helping to expand the market. When supermarkets showed steady progress in sales of organic products from the turn of the millennium and onwards, it caught the eye of investment funds such as Arev NI. The process culminated when the organic pioneers were bought out (Interview with Oddný 2017).

The investment fund Arev NI ran the company for a couple of years before selling it in 2010 to another investment fund called Auður Capital. Even so, one could still read the story of origin on the store's website. The narrative is chronological, begins in Hildur's and Rúnar's basement in 1986, and from there it goes on to describe the growth of the company; where bigger owners and bigger shopping spaces go hand in hand. It is precisely this growth that is suspect within the organic ideology that values small-scale in every aspect. What is interesting is that no words are spent on Arev NI and very few on Auður Capital in the rags to riches narrative in which Yggdrasil was presented. Instead, the focus is on Hildur and Rúnar and the enterprise of a modest family business in co-operation with a small group of likeminded people.

The way the origin story is told on the website is hardly surprising, bearing in mind what was for sale. Yggdrasil sold an image of clean nature, solid bonds between people,

and if it had to come down to business, it was justified as a necessary means to a virtuous end. The narrative of the founders, the simulacrum of Hildur and Rúnar, also helped to smooth the transition of the organic sector in Iceland into the mainstream and enable a shift towards anonymity in the ownership of the cozy organic store.

In 2012 Auður Capital closed Yggdrasill for good and opened new health stores and restaurants under the brand Lifandi markaður (Live market). The new owners claim to honor the organic values of Rúnar and Hildur but Lifandi markaður focuses on healthy living in general rather than organic food. Despite these differences, the company has invested in the cultural capital embodied by the founders Rúnar and Hildur and mediated through the origin story of Yggdrasill on the company's website. The narrative serves the purpose of reaching out to new consumers while sustaining the personal relationships that had already been established by Rúnar and Hildur over two decades.

These organic narratives shed light on the role Yggdrasill played in the organic community—as a special narrative space where alternative consumption and intimate relations went hand in hand in the encounters of people and products. In this space people could “take their time” and narrate their organic relationships. It is precisely the value of time that lies at the heart of the organic ideology and the challenges in letting things grow naturally in an industrial world.

Growing time and happiness

Corn that is grown organically, allowed to grow at its own pace and not pumped up by synthetic fertilizers or something like that. It means that there is much more energy, much more life energy in organics... Even if we forget all about the pesticides, just the fact that the plant gets to grow at its own pace, that means a lot to me (Interview with Árný 2010).

When I met Árný, she had been working in Yggdrasill for nearly 8 years. She is the first employee whom Rúnar and Hildur employed in the store at Kárastígur. As she highlights, ideas surrounding organic food are bound up with notions of time. Árný explains that she grew up in the old Icelandic rural culture that was mostly based on self-sufficiency. Today, she says, we are returning to ideas about what the land can give us so we can take better care of ourselves. Árný was certain that the food she ate as a young girl in the countryside was relatively organic, meaning that a minimal amount of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers were used in agriculture, and the food itself was simple in comparison to contemporary cuisine. Árný thus connects organic growing methods to the past—the good old days. Furthermore, Árný emphasizes the importance of consuming food that

stands close to its origins. That means that as little as possible should be done to tamper with the food; to consume the food in its original, seasonal, and simple state (Interview with Árný 2010).

Organic growing is also considered more “natural” because the plants are grown in soil. In conventional agriculture, tomatoes and other vegetables are often grown in rock wool instead of soil, and the plant is fed by an irrigation system that provides it with water and nutrients. Oddný is one of the leading figures in creating the Organic Consumer Association in Iceland, but she also worked as a consultant for Auður Capital, the investment fund that bought Yggdrasill. In our conversation, she compared the conventional agricultural system to comatose patients in hospitals. Being fed through a tube may keep you alive when you are sick but it will not keep you healthy in the long run (Interview with Oddný 2011). Oddný explains that because organic food is grown in soil it does not receive easily absorbable chemicals through a monitored irrigation system. That means that the produce does not grow as fast as it would within conventional agriculture, but it makes the food denser and nutritionally superior (Interview with Oddný 2011). Both Oddný and Árný emphasize that organic food is given time to grow in a natural way, under natural conditions, and that this gives the food density, packs it with nutrients and makes it healthier. The synthetic tubes of the conventional food industry are no match for the organic root system.

Food that is deemed to be authentic only becomes so in relation to food considered to be inauthentic (Johnston and Baumann 2010, p. 70). The common image of organic food production is small-scale rather than large scale and laid-back-natural rather than hectic-industrial (Guthman 2004). This definition stands in contrast to hectic modern existence, where life in the past is often regarded as having been governed by a slower rhythm and seasonal changes. This idea of laid-back-natural may be read as a critique of industrialized capitalism and modern-day life that is increasingly dictated by acceleration and demands of effectiveness. *Modern Times* by Charlie Chaplin (1936) captures the essence of this critique when the protagonist caves under the pressure of the assembly line and chokes on a broken “feeding machine” that tries to feed him more efficiently by speeding up the process and doing away with the lunch break. Rejecting such demands for more speed (the industrial feeding machine), the slow pace of the past is projected onto the slow growing of organic food; making the food more nutritious and natural.

David Sutton points out how memory is embedded in sensory experience in his study of how the inhabitants of the Greek Island of Kalymnos use meals to remember past meals as well as to plan future meals. The islanders thus gave structure to their individual and collective memory and strengthened their identity through food (Sutton 2001). In a similar

fashion, customers at Yggdrasill narrated their experience, reshaping the past through sensory and cognitive processes. On one occasion, an elderly woman came to Yggdrasill and declared that the organic apples in Yggdrasill were the best apples in the world. While saying this, she reached for an apple, brought it up to her nose and inhaled slowly with her eyes closed. Coming out of the trance she said the apples smelled like apples did in the old days. This referred to a time when apples were rarely seen in Iceland outside holidays such as Christmas and Easter. The elderly woman was not the only one who strolled down memory lane while eating an apple. Many older customers at the organic store told similar stories of fruit scarcity in their youth, often returning to the smell of apples at Christmas. Narrating the sensory experience of shopping and smelling an apple rekindled a nostalgic past, pleasant memories from family holidays. The narrative performance intensifies the good feeling established through past association: apples at Christmas.

In writing about “happy objects,” Sara Ahmed describes how happiness brings us into intimate contact with objects. This proximity affects us and makes us happy by directing us towards the object. Ahmed states, however, that what surrounds an object can also become happy, “if you receive something delightful in a certain place, then the place itself is invested with happiness, as being “what” good feeling is directed toward” (Ahmed 2010, p. 33). The organic food of Yggdrasill can be considered “happy objects,” as it makes people feel good. Yggdrasill made it possible for people to express that happiness.

Customers further mentioned that one reason why the organic apples tasted so good was that they did not have the wax coating that apples in supermarkets tend to have. Those remarks made contrastive reference to the modern food industry and how it has done away with both the smell and the taste of food. Organic apples smell and taste good while pointing to a past when food was supposedly simpler and healthier. Hence, organic food also promises future happiness in good health.

As happiness was performed at Yggdrasill, the store became a happy place by extension. The performance of the elderly woman created an attachment that could only have come about through closeness of other people and objects. Smelling the apples and narrating their taste for staff and customers at Yggdrasill created intimacy between those people and the organic food that brought them to the store in the first place.

Purity and size

The organic impression of “smallness” is not only found in preference for small-scale production but also in how the produce is sold and even how it looks. Indeed, one

characteristic of organic produce is its size. Although some organic products are comparable in size to conventional products, most are smaller by comparison. Organic bananas, for example, are normally smaller than their conventional counterparts. One might be forgiven for imagining that small organic produce would not be as filling as bigger conventional produce, but Árný begs to differ. Árný discovered that when she started to buy more organic food she, in fact, ate less. This was, according to Árný, because organic food is much more nutritious. Hence she needed less food to feel nourished. As a result, Árný bought less food and her grocery bill didn’t skyrocket even though organic food was considerably more expensive than conventional groceries. In this way, she justified the expenditure by adhering to organic aesthetics (Interview with Árný 2010).

Following Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), the aesthetics of everyday life are about giving form to value. They find expression in quotidian practices that range from dressing to cooking and from gardening to shopping. Organic values formed Yggdrasill as an organic shopping space in contrast to conventional grocery stores. Árný, for instance, said that Yggdrasill had been a small beautiful store when she started working at Kárástígur, with several regulars who would shop and stay for a chat (Interview with Árný 2010). The aesthetics of smallness thus extended to the physical space that literally brought people closer. As a small store based on specific food values, regular customers and staff got to know one another better through conversation, in contrast to the anonymity of supermarkets.

While the small-scale image of organic production and consumption is still important within the organic community, corporations have played the biggest role in mainstreaming organic products and providing better access to them in Iceland. It was obvious, for example, that when supermarkets began to compete for customers willing to buy organic food, the prices went down and overall sales increased. But being firmly rooted in the organic imagination, the idea of smallness can quickly clash with the mainstreaming process of organic food by corporations and supermarkets. For many adherents of organics this mainstreaming set off an alarm.

Helga, owner of the health food restaurant Krúska, sold ready-made lasagna to Yggdrasill, among other things. She described her doubts regarding the business ethics involved when the organic store was taken over by the financial service company Auður Capital. Helga felt like a fine line had been crossed. In that process, Helga said she had lost interest in Yggdrasill, and would not like to let just anybody take over her company (Interview with Helga 2010). Her words illustrate that the change in ownership contradicted the values that Helga associated with Yggdrasill. Suddenly an impersonal big business took the place of people she knew and trusted, and the store lost its intimate appeal.

Helga was not alone in understanding the importance of people doing the talking in Yggdrasill instead of money. When I asked Rúnar what kind of people shopped in Yggdrasill when they started out, his immediate response was that “they were not wealthy people!” Although not explicitly referenced, it was clear that he was responding not only to my question but also to criticism that organic food is too expensive for average people. According to Rúnar, the customers were young people who were concerned about the environment and people battling illness who wanted to improve their diet. Rúnar then added that when organic food gained in popularity, people from all corners of life began to shop in Yggdrasill. He admitted that people sometimes complained about the price of the products but emphasized the fact that it costs much more to produce organic products than conventional ones. Rúnar drew an analogy to cars when he said that a Skoda may be cheaper than a Mercedes Benz, but that much more effort goes into making a Benz (Interview with Rúnar 2011).

The manager of Yggdrasill likewise insisted on putting vision before profit. When I asked Ari about the customers who frequented the store, he said that people were surprised to learn that they were mostly people with low income: artists, students and the elderly (Interview with Ari 2010). This reference to income hints at the inclusiveness of the organic community despite the high price of products and the costliness of placing ideals before money. Interestingly enough, this image of inclusiveness stays constant from the beginning with Rúnar till the end with Ari, despite the mainstreaming of the company and the surge in affluent customers. It is worth adding that various scholarly attempts to classify organic consumers by income and education have been inconclusive (Hugner et al. 2007).

Ari rejects the notion that organic food is a luxury or a lifestyle trend available only to the upper strata of society. This non-stratification forms part of the organic values that had to be defended and was a condition for establishing the right kind of relationships at the store. As a symbolic space of organic values, Yggdrasill had to be democratic and inclusive. Organic products are for everyone, or else they are not for anyone. Sure enough, buying organic is a practice of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984) but not one that refers directly to purchasing power. Instead it refers to an awareness and responsibility; the cultural capital of the customers. As soon as one experiences “doing the right thing” as an economic privilege, it loses much of its appeal. If such experiences were defined as elitist and contingent on raw income, it would undermine the underlying altruistic value that organic food is for the betterment of society as a whole.

When it comes to the consumption of organic food, Anne Holst Andersen has noted a “plurality of competing moralities,” at work when consumers negotiate their food choices (Andersen 2011, p. 440). In that way, the price of organic

food is weighed against the responsibility of consuming it. For many people with whom I spoke, price was an obstacle in the way of buying more organic products. Svala, a student and a single mother, said that even though the price was high she opted for quality food that provided her with good health and tasted good. For her, there could be no question of buying everything organic, but she liked to prioritize her spending (Interview with Svala 2011). Sirrý, the marketing director for the Yggdrasill wholesale company, opined that people should perhaps focus more on getting quality food, considering how much they spend on things like telephones and internet. However, Sirrý expressed concern about marketing organic products during the economic crisis in Iceland as she knew that not everyone could afford organic food (Interview with Sirrý 2010).

In a similar vein, Oddný explained that even though organic food was expensive, especially for people with less income, one had to take into account that getting sick from impure and conventional food was even more costly. Oddný said she justified spending money on organic food because it is “better to pay a farmer than a doctor” (Interview with Oddný 2011). Her observation is a modern translation of the famous dictum by Hippocrates, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” Highlighting the demand for cheap food as one of the major reasons for the ills of the modern food industry, all three defended the high price of organic food with reference to its quality (both in terms of health and taste). They also defended the price on the grounds that farmers should get a fair price for their products. In other words, through price, organic food has internalized the external costs of the modern food industry. That notion is often conveyed to explain and justify organic production and consumption.

However, one indication that organic values are not priceless was the discount cart at Yggdrasill. Products about to expire were placed in a special discount cart with something between 10–20% discount. This cart was extremely popular and many customers were pleased that the discount helped to lower the food bill. Customers also used the opportunity to express frustration over the price of organic food in general, sometimes doubting whether organic food was really worth the money. The first Wednesday of every month was also a special discount day when everything in the store was 10% off. One could not help but notice how busy it was compared to the days before and after.

Sólveig is one of the leading figures in the health food movement in Iceland for the past 20 years and has known Rúnar and Hildur for a long time. When we met, she owned and ran a raw food restaurant called Gló and had her own organic product line that was sold in various supermarket chains, including the dominant low-price supermarket chain Bónus. Her products, however, were not for sale in Yggdrasill.

Sólveig's ambition, apart from providing healthy and good food, was to lower the price of organic products, taking people's complaints about the high price of organic food seriously. Sólveig said she had originally been met with skepticism from the organic community, especially for selling her products in Bónus, which is known to sell various products of questionable quality (Interview with Sólveig 2010). Sólveig brushed off that criticism by stating that equal access to good food would be in everybody's favor. When her products took off and the prices dropped, stories began to spread that the products were maybe not organic at all. This presents an interesting paradox: if the price is too high, organic food is perhaps not worth it, but when the price is too low, perhaps it is not organic. The price of organic food was thus both its justification and the obstacle to consuming it.

Sólveig maintained the importance of being in the organic business out of vision for organic food. When our conversation moved on to the changing ownership of Yggdrasill, Sólveig sighed and said she was skeptical about this development. She was afraid that the new business owners would find it difficult to stay true to the organic vision, "...this was Yggdrasill. I just couldn't think about it being fucked up. It is maybe the strongest organic symbol, and I had worked way too much with the founders..." (Interview with Sólveig 2010). The popularity of Sólveig's organic line was successful in lowering the price and increasing the sale of organic products in Iceland. The democratization of organic consumption and the availability of organic food at lower prices in large retail stores created a danger of watering down the organic vision. At a time when Sólveig, much like Rúnar and Hildur, helped supermarkets to gain "organic" ground, she feared that this change would tarnish the organic image. The symbolic importance of Yggdrasill as an organic space came into sharp relief during this transition; the store was the guarantor of organic values inside and outside its doors. Therefore, its organic integrity had to be defended against the mainstreaming process.

One problem Ari had to deal with as a manager was selling conventional products. There were not many of them on offer but Ari wanted the store to be 100% organic. The products in question were leaf greens, ready-made food (like the lasagna from Krúska), and various types of supplements. All these products sold well, drawing in revenue for the company. Ari, however, wanted to stick to the organic vision of Rúnar and Hildur, selling only organic food, and was concerned that selling food that was only labeled "natural" would devalue the organic products. Organic food is often considered "pure" because synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and the preventive use of hormones are disallowed in the production process. As an organic space, Yggdrasill both symbolized and materialized these ideals and it was therefore necessary to keep the space itself pure. The organic

products materialized the connections that were established in the store. These relationships, in turn, became meaningful in opposition to conventional food. Selling food that was not organic, even if it was considered healthy and natural, could jeopardize this image. The mainstreaming process made it essential to defend the integrity of Yggdrasill as well as the organic community that sustained it.

Pace and space

When Yggdrasill moved to a larger retail space on Rauðarárstígur in the summer of 2010, the interior of the store was designed from the outset to give an impression that stood in stark contrast to conventional supermarkets. That contrast extended from the natural wooden floors to the tables and chairs at one end of the store where people could sit down. On the wall, next to tables and chairs, the tree of life, Yggdrasill, was painted in white on a soothing dark green background.

The name itself is a powerful metaphor taken from Norse mythology, where the branches of the tree connect nine worlds and reach all the way to heaven. The tree is evergreen, supported by three roots, leading to gods and giants. In other words, the tree is central in sustaining life in the mythological community. The tree metaphor brings home the central role of Yggdrasill in the organic community in Iceland, its trunk and branches connecting actors and values in organic production and consumption. When shopping in the store, customers could connect to this foundation by supporting farmers, to whom the tree's trunk carried their livelihoods. The leafy color green was everywhere in Yggdrasill. The shopping carts and the special fruit carts were the same color as the wall with the painted tree. The fruit was kept in brown woven baskets, another earth color. The fruit cart exemplifies the natural growing process and the produce displayed on the cart as its reward.

The floor space in Yggdrasill was divided into two areas: the back was staff only and the front for customers and staff. All the products sold in the store were delivered to the rear entrance, normally in big bulk, cardboard and plastic, and then staged at the front. The exception to this was when organic growers dropped by in person with products. The apples came in big cardboard boxes that were specifically designed to protect the delicate skin of the apples from getting bruised. This was the first step in preserving their aesthetic appeal. One of my tasks though, was to take the apples out of the cardboard boxes and place them in the woven baskets in the dark green fruit carts at the entrance to the store. This, of course, was to make the apples more enticing; they were the first things people noticed when coming in from the street. If Snow White's wicked stepmother were good and life affirming rather than wicked and murderous,

she could have stood by the cart handing out red and green apples to customers entering the store.

Removing the apples from the cardboard boxes and placing them neatly in the fruit carts almost gave the impression of plucking them directly from the tree, providing customers with an aesthetic experience. Picking the apples up and placing them in woven baskets in dark green carts gave customers an opportunity to perform values like health, taste and naturalness. Everything was designed to look natural. Even the wooden floors distinguished themselves from the gray linoleum in many supermarkets.

Rúnar mentioned that when he and Hildur were working at Yggdrasill, it sometimes reminded him of a community center because they had so much fun. Many customers stopped for long conversations about everything from organic food to daily life and politics (Interview with Rúnar 2011). Yggdrasill was attractive not only for what it sold but also for what it was in the eyes of both customers and staff. It was indeed a store that sold organic products but it was also a place where food consumption was made meaningful through the engagement between customers and staff. Rúnar emphasizes fun over business and the community over the company.

Sigfús, a baker and the owner of a small organic bakery, described to me at length his experience in Yggdrasill around 1990 at Kárástígur when one could hang out and chat for a half an hour without anyone entering the store (Interview with Sigfús 2010). Likewise, in our conversations, Árný, Rúnar and Sigfús all focused in on the special atmosphere that distinguished Yggdrasill when it was situated in Kárástígur. What stands out is how they all relate to the time people spent in the store and the communication that took place. Yggdrasill made it possible to engage in different kinds of interactions; set off by its slow tempo and limited clientele. In supermarkets, the anonymity of the ownership normally also extends to the people who work there. But in Yggdrasill, customers got to know the owners personally and their shared organic values served as a conversation starter.

In his seminal work on *Rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre introduced the concept of “rhythm” to describe the relation of time to space. Unlike many other analyses of time (work, leisure and lived time), which rarely address the spatial context, rhythm is the embodiment of time that is bound up with everyday life in a specific place. Lefebvre emphasizes the body as an instrument of research, the repetitive movements of bodies through space and the impressions (smells and textures) they leave and encounter while doing so. Moreover, Lefebvre points out that rhythms can only be defined in relation to other rhythms. A slow rhythm is therefore only slow in relation to a faster rhythm (Lefebvre 2015).

In comparison to conventional supermarkets, everything was slower in Yggdrasill at Rauðarárstígur. Customers, for instance, drove the small green carts slower than

in supermarkets, threading casually through the different sections and aisles, picking up products, comparing them and reading the labels. Counting in the conversations with the staff and with other customers, it was quite common for customers to spend somewhere between half an hour to one hour in the store. There were rarely queues, and instead of a conveyor belt, there was a counter with two registers. Usually one person could check out the customers. The organic space was experienced as slow, as organic bodies moved slowly through it.

Another aspect that made Yggdrasill stand out was the large space where one could sit down to relax and talk over coffee or tea. All sorts of reading material on organic food and products were made available there, alongside leaflets and posters on yoga classes, Indian ayurvedic treatments and even health spas. This was a part of the healthy life style promoted in the store, connecting mind and body in an organic lifestyle. Yggdrasill thus carved out a calm space where it was possible to mentally unwind over a cup of organic tea. This space covered almost 1/3 of the total area of the store, turning valuable (and expensive) retail space over to contemplation. This signaled its difference from conventional grocery stores, emphasizing alternative values that countered the non-stop conveyor belt.

Reading a leaflet on kundalini yoga while sipping tea gave the impression that Yggdrasill was more akin to a meditative community center than an actual shop. This echoes Rúnar’s sentiment, who always considered Yggdrasill to be more of a community center than a retail space. But there is one important difference: when the store was at Kárástígur, and Rúnar and Hildur greeted customers, the space itself was not intentionally designed to facilitate communications and relaxation as such. Neither was this the case at its second location in Skólavörðustígur, to which the founders moved it before they sold it in 2008. However, when the store moved to Rauðarárstígur under new ownership in 2010, the space was intentionally designed to promote this community atmosphere that had grown “organically” with time at the other locations. During this transformation, it was interesting to note that the introduction of risk capital and anonymous ownership did not seem to influence daily practices at the organic store much. Although many of my informants expressed doubts about the changing ownership, they still shopped and spent time in the store like before, drinking coffee and chatting.

With earthy tones, friendly staff and free organic refreshments, the store transformed the shopping experience by giving the impression of slowing down the hectic pace of life outside its doors. Ari, the manager, often spent considerable time talking to customers, many of whom he knew from frequent encounters at the store. Ari also knew most of the organic producers in the country and spoke regularly with them when they dropped by. The daily chat that Ari engaged

in could be mistaken for slacking, but that would miss the point. Small talk was an intrinsic part of his job as manager of Yggdrasill. The arrival of a new harvest from domestic growers was awaited with excitement and Ari would inform customers about when the products would be available in the store and provide them with the latest news about the growers. Ari also received wishes from customers about specific kinds of vegetables that they were interested in buying. He would then call the growers and ask them whether they were interested in growing these vegetables. This communication back and forth between domestic producers and customers created intimate relationships. The consumers felt that they could influence what was produced and producers felt appreciated for their labor.

Emotional practices

Yggdrasill was designed for the experience of connectedness through practices of selling and purchasing organic food. Scheer has pointed out that emotional practices are “carried out together with other people, artifacts, aesthetic arrangements, and technologies... But we are also sometimes simply confronted with an emotional setup” (Scheer 2012, p. 209). In various ways, Yggdrasill provided a perfect emotional setup. This setup, for example, encouraged customers to comment on the food that they purchased. Descriptions of how they discovered the food and how that made them feel often followed. Cherry tomatoes and carrots were popular and praised for their taste. Customers smiled, even laughed, and their bodily postures signaled excitement about the prospect of tasting the food soon. The act of buying organic food made customers feel good.

My encounters in the organic store were at times humorous. One day when I was working the register a customer came in and asked whether we still sold organic memory drops. He had bought them a few weeks ago, but he could not remember what they were called. I smiled in sympathy. Experience seemed not to have proven the effect of the drops beyond a reasonable doubt.

It was striking how much of the work in the store revolved around emotional management. It was quite common, for instance, for pregnant women to ask about whether this or that product was safe to eat or drink. Others wanted to know which products could help them to avoid all kinds of illnesses, or cure them. Health has been singled out as one of the strong motivational factors for choosing organic food, and in Yggdrasill, the sales of supplements (ironically mostly not organic) testified to that (Fernqvist and Ekelund 2013, 2014; Hugnner et al. 2007).

I did not have much training in dealing with these kinds of questions and every time they were brought up (especially ones that had to do with diseases) I took a deep breath and

suggested that they should seek advice from a health professional before making any decision. Some took that as a valid answer (even an honest one) but others were clearly frustrated that I could not provide them with a simple yes or no. One person even scolded me when I hesitated and asked whether I knew anything about the products I was selling!

Confronted with all these questions of personal health, I was astonished by the level of trust customers showed in me. Many informants were not only skeptical towards the modern food industry but also towards health professionals (especially doctors) and the pharmaceutical industry. Just mentioning doctors in conversation could solicit anger and frustration. But these same people sought out the professional opinion of the guy checking out their groceries.

This emotional management resonates with what has been termed “caring” and/or “affective labor” (Hardt and Negri 2000; Smith 1987). This kind of labor focuses on human contact and is closely connected to healthcare personnel. The products of this kind of labor are positive feelings that are prerequisite to form new kinds of intimate relationships and communities. However, with diminishing trust in conventional healthcare in general, health store employees, such as the staff in Yggdrasill, rise in authority and are counted on to give advice on organic products and healthy living.

In explaining why people trust strangers with something as intimate as our food, Bildtgård (2008) suggests that trust is mediated through *social roles*. As an example, he takes the butcher whom we trust to handle meat with care, based on profession rather than personal acquaintance. In a way, the staff at Yggdrasill had taken over from dietitians and medical doctors; we were trusted because we shared the customers’ organic values. Daily chores in the store included alleviating anxiety and generating wellbeing connected to the consumption of organic food. Small gestures like, for example, offering customers organic refreshments made them feel welcome and was an opener for conversations about food and especially food anxieties. Customers often shared stories with staff members regarding all sorts of health problems and how organic food had made them feel better. These stories usually met with approval from staff members as indicated through attentive listening, words of advice, and bodily gestures such as sympathetic smiles and head nods. The staff thus engaged with the customer’s intimate emotional life through feelings of trust arising from shared organic values.

In managing my own feelings during this process, I was reminded of Hochschild’s work on “emotional labor,” which describes how people in different occupations manage their emotions at work, both through speech and bodily gestures (Hochschild 2012). She focused on the experience of flight attendants and how they were trained to manage their emotions, removing irritation and anger when provoked by passengers. Personally, I often had to suppress my irritation, even my anger, when talking to customers in the store. I

noticed this especially when conversations moved over to conspiracy theories of how the modern food industry, in co-operation with the pharmaceutical companies, dietitians and medical doctors, was deliberately sabotaging our health. During these conversations I normally kept my feelings to myself. Yggdrasill also sold homeopathic remedies that were supposed to cure everything from depression to the common cold. Selling them often left a bad taste in my mouth, though that did not stop me from doing it with a smile on my face. Behaving in this way was never explicitly demanded of me by the company but both as a researcher and an employee, I felt that I could not upset or anger customers by expressing my disbelief in things they valued deeply (Cherry et al. 2010; Jönsson 2012).

One of the most popular items in Yggdrasill was baby food. Many parents shook their heads in moral outrage when talking about “bad” industrial baby food and found it upsetting that parents would give their children such food. This brings to mind Daniel Miller’s analysis of the contradictions of shopping as people form and affirm caring relationships through consumption. In the process that Miller refers to as “making love in supermarkets,” the objectification inherent in the shopping experience creates meaningful relationships between people (Miller 2001). Shopping becomes a labor of love where, for example, parents show affection by buying organic food for their little ones. It also underlines social distinction as organic parents vent their dismay at conventional parents. Sírý, for instance, claimed that access to pure and good food for one’s children is a basic human right and it almost crushed her heart seeing non-organic milk powder for babies (Interview with Sírý 2010).

Besides providing healthy food for those who stand closest, this emotional labor is also performed for the sake of the environment and to support organic producers—love for the near and dear is extended to the earth and to one’s fellow man. Reciprocity was an important factor when customers spoke about organic producers. Customers in Yggdrasill generally acknowledged that growing organic was more work because growers were not allowed to use synthetic fertilizers and various pesticides. They respected the work that went into growing organic and took it as a sign of the dedication and the care of organic growers. If organic growers grew food the right way, such reciprocity provided consumers with the opportunity to put their organic values into practice and engage with food production. Sírý said that she really cared about organic growers, many of whom she had visited, because they cared about other people, as well as for animals and the environment (Interview with Sírý 2010).

When customers in Yggdrasill discussed organic farmers they would often cast them in the role of caretakers of both the earth and its people. If organic growers took care of the soil, the foundation, then customers and staff could take care of the growers by selling and purchasing their products. Care

for the foundation was reciprocated by caring for the organic growers: creating an intimate relationship.

Organic intimacy

Narratives, time, rhythm, purity, size and space: these were the key factors in forming intimate relationships at Yggdrasill. From the beginning, Yggdrasill represented “something else”: the atmosphere, the organic products, the shopping space, the staff, and the customers. The cozy little store stood in contrast to almost everything that people normally associate with supermarkets. In Yggdrasill, shopping and selling organic food were emotional practices that could be noticed in everything from lively conversations and storytelling to the aesthetics and slow rhythm. Staff members and customers conversing while sipping organic coffee and tea, elderly people smelling apples and organic parents scolding their conventional counterparts for “poisoning” their kids are just a few examples of how organic intimacy was established in Yggdrasill. The organic store was a distinctive organic space where staff and customers could express feelings of love, hate, anger, joy, frustration and anxiety.

Shopping for and selling organic food in Yggdrasill illustrates how people establish intimacy within the modern food chain through emotional practices. To counter the fears of consumers caught within the anonymous modern food system, information is provided to promote transparency (no dirty secrets), which in turn creates trust. However, my research at Yggdrasill has led me to the conclusion that intimacy is key to understanding the notion of trust within the food chain. The desire for intimacy is what brings people to organic stores like Yggdrasill and it is the emotional practices that are carried out at those places that foster intimacy and its product: trust.

Staff and customers in Yggdrasill shared feelings of reciprocity, not only towards organic producers, but also towards each other through acts of buying and selling organic food. What took place at the store can be defined as “organic intimacy,” which is an emotional attachment created through meaningful practice. Neither static nor fixed in time, such intimacy is a continuous process that both establishes and sustains relationships between people, as well as material objects. This calls for further ethnographic exploration into the actual consumption of organics, but also into the role of emotions and how the doing of emotions makes everyday food consumption meaningful within the industrial food system.

The case of Yggdrasill blurs the lines between “alternative” and “mainstream” consumption. The conventionalization of organics with increased investment, as witnessed in the changed ownership of Yggdrasill, did not reduce the emotional practices that took place at the store and created

a stark contrast to supermarkets. As part of the mainstreaming process the organic space at Yggdrasill was more strictly choreographed, but that did not diminish the need for meaningful interaction between staff and customers. On the contrary, being able to discuss and criticize the mainstreaming process of organics was an intrinsic part of the shopping experience in Yggdrasill and seemed to matter more with every step taken towards the mainstream food market.

When Yggdrasill formally closed its doors in 2012, it became apparent that the company was the victim of its own success. The new owners of Yggdrasill followed a different (and less organic) path than the original owners. The health store and restaurant Maður Lifandi was raised on the ruins of Yggdrasill and focused on healthy living rather than organic per se. Symbolic of this change was the location of Maður Lifandi. Whereas Yggdrasill had been located downtown, Maður Lifandi was established a bit further away in the center of Reykjavík's financial district. In the end, the Armani suits found their way back home—and took organics with them.

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