ENACTING SWISS CHEESE: ABOUT THE MULTIPLE ONTOLOGIES OF LOCAL FOOD

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BEYOND RADICAL CRITICISM IN FOOD LOCALISATION

Environment, localisation and fairness are no longer the uncomplicated defining characteristics of alternative food networks. Instead, they have been integrated into the vocabulary of marketers and are now efficient tools for positioning products in the market. Largely inspired by political economy approaches, agrifood scholars have produced very critical interpretations of this kind of transition in food systems. This dominant epistemological posture has produced a binary framing of the question of what is genuinely alternative. With concepts such as bifurcation and conventionalisation, orthodox agrifood political economy questions the capacity of such alternative patterns to transform the conventional food system, building on an implicit opposition between 'real alternatives' and 'conventional appropriations'.

In this chapter, I argue that we have to look beyond an underlying binary opposition between true alternatives and perverted and sterilised mutations. To do so, I draw on a research project focusing on what could be called a conventionalisation of food localism in Switzerland[1]. However, this framing is highly unsatisfactory and of little use in describing what is happening in the emerging food networks I observed in my research, mainly because, following Rosin and Campbell (2009: 43-44), it offers 'an overly structured analysis of what is an evolving and volatile process'.

This dominant binary framework was initially developed in the critical study of the evolution of organic food networks (e.g. Guthman, 2004). However, the same kind of framework can also be found in the literature on local food. Originally, the virtue of localism - small scale, renewed proximity between actors, and specific connection with places - was central to the study of alternative food networks, as it embodied a rejection of a capitalised, industrialised and globalised hegemonic system: the 'food from nowhere regime' (e.g. McMichael, 2002). However, after a short period of somewhat naïve enthusiasm, the literature on food localism has become more critical and has revealed a more complex and questionable reality. Scholars have shown how the 'local trap' (Born and Purcell, 2006: 195) or an 'unreflexive localism' (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005) conflates characteristics of food networks, assuming that *local* automatically equals *alternative* or *sustainable*, while being sometimes *defensive* and reinforcing social and identity boundaries with little attention paid to ecological or social justice (e.g. Winter, 2003). The mainstreaming of *local food label'* led by the big retail and supermarket chains, brings into the discussion another group of critics, who point to the conventionalisation argument, whereby food labels (e.g. local, organic) actually enable the neoliberalisation of environmental governance and nature (e.g. Guthman, 2007).

My case studies involve the development of dairy products led by farmers' cooperative structures, which are using localness and provenance as a central claim. While drawing largely on 'alternative' values, such as localism, solidarity and environmentalism, these initiatives are fully entangled within the conventional food system with close relations with big supermarket chains and large dairy companies (Forney and Häberli, 2015; Häberli and Forney, forthcoming). Mindful of the afore-mentioned discussion, I choose, in this chapter, to look beyond the

imperfections of such networks and explore the transformational potential they might nevertheless contain. In doing so, I want to answer Gibson-Graham's (2008) call to 'read for difference' in the exploration of diverse economies (see also Wynne-Jones, 2014) . In other words, while most of the literature looks at how dominant actors subsume alternative values, I look for the cross-contaminations that might potentially transform food networks. To do so, I draw on a body of scholarship developing around the concept of *enactive research*. This implies making a little detour to some fundamental insights inspired by actor-network theory, such as the agency of non-human actors and the multiplicity of ontologies. I use these concepts to describe the development of local dairy products in Switzerland. The identification of multiple ontologies of one of these local cheeses will enable us to think about the enactiveness of social sciences, first as an unveiling of a *side-effect* of doing research, and then and above all as a fundamental question: how do I integrate this liveliness in a consciously enactive research programme?

CURRENT TRANSFORMATION OF THE SWISS DAIRY SECTOR

Milk production is an important element of Swiss agriculture with about 24,400 dairy farms from a total of 56,575 farms (FOAG, 2014). In Switzerland, the dairy industry is usually divided into two sectors: the *industry milk* chain and the *cheese milk* chain. In the first, farmers supply a few big processing companies that produce mainly dairy products for direct consumption (yogurts, butter, milk and pasteurised industrial cheese) and for the food industry (e.g. milk powder, butter). In the second, farmers supply cheese dairies with high quality (produced without silage feeding) raw milk. This premium cheese production is characterised by the existence of several *protected designation of origin* (PDO) labels. Both sectors have been facing challenging times in the last decade, mainly because of a progressive programme of market deregulation initiated by the federal state. A significant step in this process has been the removal of federal milk quotas which resulted in decreasing prices, overproduction and discord among actors (Forney, 2012). In the *industry milk* chain, farmers have to choose between dealing directly with a dairy company as a *direct producer*, or joining a *producers' organisation* (PO), whose main task is to purchase milk from farmers and sell it to the industry. POs' nature and strategies are diverse (Häberli and Forney, forthcoming) and there is little unity among them. As a consequence, deregulation has led to an increase in national competition among milk producers. In contrast, in the cheese milk chain many small-scale production facilities exist, while a few large PDOs, organised around inter-professional boards, lead the sector. The progressive deregulation of agriculture has gone hand-in-hand with its ecologisation under the guidance of the federal agricultural policy. Since the 1990s, Switzerland has adopted a multifunctional paradigm based on farmers' cross-compliance with environmental schemes within a system of direct remuneration. This political reorientation parallels an evolution of the markets for food products, which is characterised by the multiplication of food labels. For products issuing from Swiss agriculture, these labels refer mainly to two kinds of justification: the environment (e.g. organic) and provenance and localisation (e.g. PDOs). In this chapter I will focus mainly on the latter, as they play a central role in our case studies.

DATA AND METHODS

This chapter is based on a research project that explored the evolution of the Swiss dairy industry, in particular its *industry milk* chain, after the removal of the national quota system in 2009. The project was divided into two phases. From the beginning, the intention was to draw on the results of phase one to build up the second, using a more participatory approach, following an inductive and iterative research process. In the first phase, we studied several cases of food relocalisation initiatives that had been launched by farmers' cooperatives with the general aim of improving the situation and position of the dairy farmers. More precisely, we developed three case studies. One is located in the canton of Vaud and is about the development of local cheese specialities by *Prolait*, the regional federation of dairy cooperatives. Another is located in the north-west part of Switzerland and is about the revival of an own brand of the regional dairy farmers' federation, *MIBA*. And the last one is in the canton of Glarus and describes the new partnership between a local dairy farmers' co-op and a local cheese factory. In these three case studies we looked at how the local had been reinterpreted and reformulated and at the kinds of changes that resulted from these new strategies (Forney and Häberli, 2015). Furthermore, it appeared that at least two of these initiatives had been developed as an answer to a fundamental questioning

of the structural character of the POs. Consequently, the second phase developed a broader reflection on the present evolution of cooperative structures in a context of deregulation and liberalisation (Häberli and Forney, forthcoming). This paper draws more directly on the first phase of the project and specifically on one of its case studies: the *Prolait* federation and its new cheese initiative.

Our data came out of 49 semi-structured interviews and a range of informal interviews and direct observations during meetings, assemblies and public events. From these interviews, 19 directly concern the *Prolait* case study. The interviews were directed at gaining an understanding of the strategies, the historical background of the cooperative structures and the changes that result (or should result at a later stage) from the new initiatives. They were conducted with members of the management boards of the cooperatives, with farmers, and with representative of several stakeholders (e.g. retailers, dairy companies, authorities).

The project applied classical qualitative research methods. However, from conception to the last phases of the project, the intention was to remain receptive to significant shifts in connections, relations and practices. A posteriori, it might be said that this methodological posture coupled the following developments with an enactive research approach.

Non-human actors, multiple ontologies and enactive research

Three main theoretical sources inspired this chapter and its reflection on the *enactiveness* of research. Firstly, a very basic notion of actor-network theory is central: social life is made by human and non-human actors in their numerous connections. What interests me here more precisely is how acknowledging this changes our perception of agency and action in a (food) network. Secondly, the notion of *multiple ontologies* emphasizes the processes in which different sets of relations result in coexisting ontological variants of what something is. Finally, by developing enactive research approaches, we try to integrate these first two insights into the practice of social science.

Non-human actors and agency

Agrifood chains can be understood as wide networks of human (e.g. agro-merchants, farmers, retailers) and non-human (e.g. animals, soil, water, tractors, laws, labels) actors engaged around the production, processing, marketing and consumption of food products. In the study of agri-food networks, one of the key contributions of actor-network theory (ANT) has been to emphasize the role played by these non-human actors (actants) (e.g. Latour, 1996). Non-human beings are not to be understood as being only passive recipients of human action. They have an active role in the production of social life and reality, 'in interaction that is simultaneously material and social' (Law and Urry, 2004: 395). What interests me more specifically here is the application of this approach to the definition of agency and action (Dwiartama and Rosin, 2014). Non-human actors act because of and through their connections with others actors, by being part of a network. Obviously, the capacity to act does not depend on the actant alone, but on its *co-actors* within the network. Moreover, agency has a collective dimension and, following Law and Mol (2008: 72): 'it is not always clear who is doing what. Action moves around. It is like a viscous fluid.'

Consequently, the outcomes of action within an actor-network are never limited to what human consciousness has planned. Non-human actors have their say as well and the interactions within the networks might have unexpected results. Paraphrasing Law and Mol again, we can say that what results is hard to predict, 'for assemblages, like actors, are creative. They have novel effects and they make new things' (2008: 74). Coming back to food networks and marketing strategies, we can conclude that the motivations and narratives developed by human actors are perhaps not the best criteria to assess the transformative potential of a strategy, for example the development of a local food network. Non-human elements, such as a speciality cheese, the sets of standards for a food label, or nutritional needs of cows will interfere and contribute to the production of the final outcomes.

ENACTING MULTIPLE ONTOLOGIES

Multiple ontologies result from multiple enactments of things in multiple networks of belonging. What is referred to as the same *thing* exists simultaneously in diverse ontologies. This multiplicity of ontologies is more easily demonstrated for highly complex phenomena such climate change (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010). However, it is valid for *simple* things as well, like a sheep, as brilliantly illustrated by Law and Mol (Law and Mol, 2008), or a cheese. Law and Mol describe how *the* Cumbrian sheep is involved in different practices in the context of the foot-and-mouth-disease crisis in the UK. These practices enact this sheep in different ways that are not only about diverging *interpretations* of the animal, but about ontologies: 'In each of these practices 'a sheep' is something different' (Law and Mol, 2008: 59). The same approach can be applied to more abstract actors too, like concepts or inanimate beings such as the foot-and-mouth disease itself (Law and Mol, 2011). Similarly, in our research, we explored the multiplicity of the *local* in our three case studies (Forney and Häberli, 2015), looking at how diverse configurations of actors resulted in varying definitions (ontologies) of *local food*. Looking for multiple ontologies gives a powerful framework for understanding how things are constructed and identities are created within networks of human and non-human actors.

ENACTIVE RESEARCH

Taking stock of the enacted dimension of reality, Law and Urry, among others, insist on the role of social sciences in the process of enactment. In particular, they highlight the role played by the method, with 'the prospect that it [the method] helps to produce the realities that it describes' (Law and Urry, 2004: 397). In other words, the multiplicity of ontologies also relates to the multiplicity of methods and, it should be added, theories. For concepts, metrologies, and other scientific artefacts are non-human actants like others and are therefore enactive. These considerations were first formulated as part of a reflexive analysis of sciences (STS) in the aftermath of constructionism and postmodern theories. However, the enactive dimension of social analysis has quickly gained a more programmatic dimension: given that our work as social scientists participates anyway in enacting specific ontologies, can we choose how we want to be enactive by rethinking the methods and epistemologies in our practice of research? Lowe reframed this question in the context of rural sociology and agri-food studies by claiming that social sciences should contribute to 'enact[ing] novel realities', through discursive and methodological creativity (Lowe, 2010: 312).

As clearly stated by the editors, most of the contributors to this book join this *enactive turn* (Lewis and Rosin, 2013) that embraces the work on enactment as described above, but also other scholarship such as that around the work of Gibson-Graham on performative knowledge (Gibson-Graham, 2008) and the so-called ontological turn (Carolan, 2009). Gibson-Graham firstly suggested that by focusing on the power of capitalism, critical scholars have participated in the realisation of an omnipotent capitalism by obscuring all alternatives and despising them for their capitalist taint. The author(s) suggest that we should think differently and look for glimpses of differences that glow within a context dominated by capitalism, rather than always focusing on a radical and pure alternative. By doing so, we would not only allow the identification of diverse economies and diverse logics, but we would also empower them and this, per se, would 'generate new possibilities' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 623). Carolan says something similar when he claims that by writing now about what was once 'beyond the imaginable' on one hand proves that things have changed, and on the other hand contributes to 'enliven[ing]' the world in a way that will sustain this change (Carolan, 2013: 424). In other words, this suggests that we have to work at the level of ontologies in order to put forward a new economic ontology that might allow space for new economic practices and experiments.

Consequently, this range of scholarship adds one important (if not totally new) argument to Law and Urry's analysis of the enactive role of social sciences. It might be hard, if not impossible, to assess and control how the concepts and methods we use in our research enact multiple realities. However, it is easier to reflect on how we *read* the world and what might be the consequences of this (not always) conscious choice. Moreover, this fundamental reflexivity appears to be absolutely necessary to engage knowingly and with full awareness in enactive efforts.
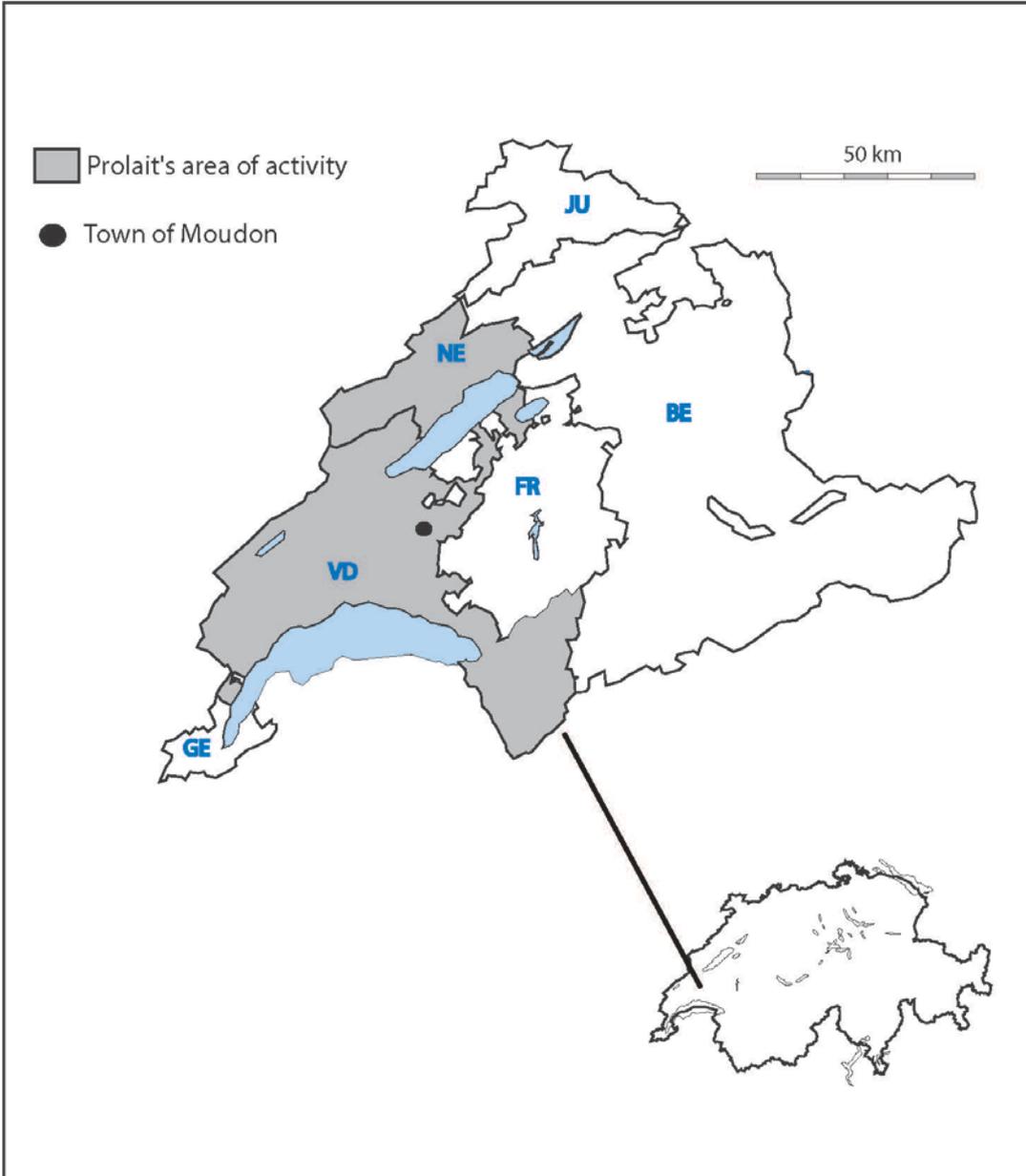
THE ENROLMENT OF LOCAL CHEESE SPECIALITIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR BETTER MILK PRICES

I want to go back now to one of our case studies, located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. There, a regional dairy farmers' federation, *Prolait*, had recently taken over the local production of cheese specialities in the town of Moudon in the canton of Vaud (see map, figure 1). Historically this range of five types of soft cheese specialities was related to the cantonal school for cheese-making and was developed mainly for teaching purposes. These somewhat *French-style* cheeses offered a relatively atypical profile in the Swiss cheese landscape, largely dominated – qualitatively and quantitatively – by hard cheese varieties. The school closed in 2004, endangering their production. At this time, *Prolait* was looking for innovative solutions for the milk produced in its 'industry' chain. These specialities had one interesting characteristic: using *industry milk* to produce them does not adversely affect their basic qualities. This is not the case with the long-lasting hard Swiss cheeses. New connections were then possible. *Prolait's* project involved the creation of a new brand (*Le Grand Pré*) for regional dairy products, the construction of a new cheese factory and the creation of a small limited company (*Le Grand Pré SA*) to run it. *Prolait* fully owns *Le Grand Pré SA*. Building the cheese factory required significant investment, which was financed jointly by public money, borrowing and the *Prolait* investment fund (comprising members' contributions). Theoretically, when the company becomes profitable, the profits will be transferred to all the members of *Prolait* (dairy farmers) by means of a higher milk price.

This enrolment of the Moudon cheese specialities in the federation's activities took place within a longer-term reflection and strategy. After the deregulation of the milk market, *Prolait* was directly confronted with the general unsustainability of the food system in which they were embedded, above all regarding the economic and social sustainability at the level of the dairy farms. For a few years, possibilities of improvement of the milk price paid to members were explored. The federation mandated an extension organisation to develop an analysis of the market perspectives of different strategies based on the relocalisation of milk production. At the same time, research into the provenance of the fodder and feed given to the dairy cows on farms of the federation was co-developed in collaboration with a research institute. The main idea was to find a position on the market by assuming a strong and *coherent* localisation. Such a position was developed in opposition to retailers' labels for regional products that are, in the eyes of the federation, in many ways *inconsistent*, and often do not benefit the farmers. The investment in the cheese factory and in the new brand was the first concrete step in this process, after years of thinking and planning. The production of the Moudon cheese specialities, renamed under the new brand *le Grand Pré*, started in 2013. While several small retailers were involved, a partnership with one of the major Swiss supermarket chains was crucial to reaching significant quantities. However, *Prolait* processes only a small portion of its milk through this channel and production will still have to grow significantly to reach profitability.

In retrospect, the most significant effect of this initiative has probably been, so far, the creation of new relations and assemblages around the federation activities. In the preparatory phase, *Prolait* collaborated with actors from research and extension, with the regional authorities and with specialists in branding and marketing. In order to organise the retailing of its products, it developed closer partnerships with supermarkets and retailers. More generally, the whole process impacted on its relations with its usual partners, namely the dairy company *Cremo*.

FIGURE 1: PROLAIT'S AREA OF ACTIVITY IN THE CANTON OF VAUD

THE MULTIPLE ONTOLOGIES OF THE LOCAL CHEESE

The enrolment of the *Grand Pré* cheese specialities in *Prolait*'s strategies results in multiple translation processes and production of meanings. We have described elsewhere (Forney and Häberli, 2015) how the *local* was enacted and produced in multiple parallel ways in our case studies. Here, I want to focus on the multiple ontologies of the cheese itself. More precisely, I will describe now two dominant enactments: the market cheese and the cooperative cheese (see also table 1). Both are of particular interest in the analysis of the transformative potential of such initiatives as they illustrate two political paradigms often considered in opposition, solidarity and market competition.

TABLE 1 : TWO MOUDON CHEESE'S ONTOLOGIES

	Market cheese	**Co-op cheese**
Characteristics	- Local as market positioning - Competition for market shares	- Symbol of identification - Solidarity - Collective investments
Critical look	- Neoliberal inspiration	- Conservative localism
Seed of change	- New knowledge - Empowerment	- Reconnections - Actual autonomy

THE MARKET CHEESE: LOCAL FOOD AS NEOLIBERALISM IN DISGUISE?

A critical approach to the localisation strategies implemented in our case studies indicates that their inspiration comes first of all from a neoliberal rationality. Economic actors (farmers as entrepreneurs) regroup to maximize their power in the market and thus their profit. Because they identified a growing demand from consumers for localised food products, they used their own potential as providers of local products through proximity between, as example, consumers and producers, or between distinct regional identities. Consequently, they decided to invest and target this niche market through collaboration with big retailers. The operation and the change implied were only located at the level of marketing and investments. No change was made at the farm level in the farm practices and no alternative retailing system was developed. The cheese was mainly integrated into the conventional food system with an aura of localness. In short, the main – if not only – purpose of the development of this cheese production was to obtain better prices for the farmers by exploiting a new trend in the market. This is what the actors involved in these new networks explicitly told us. For the federation board, membership has to become more attractive through a higher milk price. For the farmers, the investment has to be profitable. For the retailer, the cheese must first and above all sell.

Many are sceptical when evaluating this initiative's chances of success: the investment is high, the quantities remain limited. Still, the criteria that are mobilised to assess this success are economic and market related. Even if they were to fail, these local cheese specialities are market cheese.

As emphasized both by the board members and their retail partners, developing such a strategy for the federation implies developing important new skills and knowledge at the marketing and trading level. The federation board members have to learn how to sell and how to behave with trade partners. This new situation initiated a process of knowledge – and competence - building in the federation to improve its overall ability to act in the food network. At the same time, the farmers' role has been reframed and the assemblage of actors involved has been reshaped. Farmers are no longer the 'simple commodity producers' (Friedmann, 1978)

subsumed in the agro-industrial complex; they have something more to sell than just raw material for the agro-industry: a brand, their image, and their localness. They can actually start to negotiate with other actors. As an example, the board of *Le Grand Pré SA* was surprised by its success in negotiating with one of the big Swiss retailers: the supermarket chain wanted to integrate the cheese under its own brand for local products, putting on the side the name *Le Grand Pré*. At the end of a long discussion, the board members of *Prolait* and *Le Grand Pré* managed to maintain the name and the brand on the packaging, which was central to their marketing strategy. Arguably, then, the market cheese ontology results in the relative empowerment of farmers within the food network.

THE COOPERATIVE CHEESE: ALTERNATIVES IN NARRATIVE AND STRATEGY?

The development of the new cheese factory and the launch of the *Le Grand Pré* brand were based on a typically cooperative principle: joint investment and shared benefits. This constitutes the basis of the cooperative cheese ontology. The explicit use of the values of solidarity and autonomy (from the big companies) by *Prolait* has been amplified by the general context of an industry characterized by disagreement and competition between producers' organisations. The cooperative cheese has turned into a symbol of solidarity among dairy farmers, at least at the regional level. It provides new opportunities for collective identification with the federation and with the region. As stated by one of our interviewees from another case study: 'You need a symbol to build up identification' [2]. This identification is part of a process of collective autonomisation that offers interesting parallels with actual autonomy as described by Stock et al. (2014), as a way of creating solidarity and collective action despite a hegemonic narrative based on individualism and competition.

Consequently, the localisation process enables reconnection in the food network: farmers' reconnection with the final food product and consumers' reconnection to a place through the cheese specialities. With the enactment of the cooperative cheese, solidarity develops not only among dairy farmers, but also between consumers and local producers. The cooperative cheese questions the stereotype of the supermarket customer looking above all for low prices. In a way, the cooperative cheese also mitigates the identity of the big retailers. They are often described, notably by farmers, as heartless and greedy in business. Interestingly, the board of *Prolait* started to speak differently of them, as real partners. Simultaneously, a representative of one of the two big supermarket chains highlighted that their interest in dealing with a farmers' co-op could be to gain access to the farmers and make possible renewed dialogue.

The reconfiguration of the network developing around the cooperative cheese leads to the re-negotiation of what was previously taken for granted: the role of the producers, the total dependence on the big dairy companies and retailers and the passivity of consumers. This process will potentially result in a better situation for dairy farmers. What the cooperative cheese emphasizes is that this empowerment of farmers in the food network is only possible through acts of collaboration.

THE (EN-)ACTIVE CHEESE

If I were to adopt an orthodox critical perspective, I would look at the ways in which these experiments might offer alternatives to the current state of the food system. On one hand, and following the logic of the market cheese, the Moudon specialities can be easily related to a process of neoliberalisation of agrifood networks, where market instruments developed by the private sector (certification and branding) replace former state regulation of the sector (milk quotas). The localisation strategy parallels other labels and food standards for more sustainable food that have long been related to a neoliberal mode of governance of food and natural resource

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[2] While this quotation is related to one of the other case studies, it perfectly reflects this aspect of *Prolait* strategy.

management. Indeed, they rely on market logic and consumer choice rather than democratic regulation and state intervention (e.g. Moberg, 2014). I would conclude that the most significant effect produced by these cheese specialities is the implementation of neoliberal principles in the strategies of dairy cooperative structures. On the other hand, the focus set by the cooperative cheese on farmers' empowerment rings some familiar bells from the literature on food localism. The *Prolait* initiative aims mainly at improving the situation of local farmers, without more ambitious goals at the level of the food system. We are close here to an *unreflexive* localism (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005).

While being very different, these two ontologies of the Moudon cheese would then suggest a similar conclusion: *Prolait*'s initiative does not produce very significant change in the food system. Narratives of autonomisation and empowerment of the farmer could well be criticised as illusory: since dependencies are too deeply rooted in the food system and the production of cheese specialities is too restricted to shift this balance of power. The cooperative cheese arguably denies this interpretation, but at the same time confirms that the main goals have always been, above all, economic benefit for the farmer and not broader sustainability of the food system. My conclusion could well be that this is all smoke and mirrors and that there is no real alternativeness about the Moudon cheese. In so doing, I would just be adding another set of cases to theories demonstrating the conventionalisation of food alternatives in the context of food localism.

However, drawing on the emerging enactive research approach, I choose a more nuanced and optimistic conclusion. It begins by acknowledging that the choices I make as a researcher participate in enacting the world. This means that the *real* transformative potential of such imperfect alternatives depends partly on us as researchers, and on the ontologies we contribute to create. This is close to what Gibson-Graham (2008) calls 'reading for difference'. Furthermore, their potential cannot be reduced to the actions of human individuals. Moreover, it comes out of an ever-repeated process of negotiation and translation within a network, where non-human actants play a significant role. This complex set of relations participates in the wider creation of new meaning and social processes by producing multiple ontologies. As I am writing these lines, the members of the *Prolait* management board are working on the further development of their new brand. They are discussing projects for applying a stronger definition of the local, including the origin of the fodder given to the dairy cows. They are thinking about what kind of product would best fit their concept of fairer and more sustainable trade in the Swiss dairy industry. These developments go further than what they had in mind at the beginning of the process. However, once they had enrolled the cheese specialities in their new initiative, they opened the door to new rationalities and experiments these new elements brought with them. As expressed in an interview, the management board of *Prolait* is half aware of this enactive capacity of the new products: 'I'm convinced that once we have created the market, this is something that will stay, even develop, because the consumers' interest goes in this direction: with environmental practices… food security problems around the world… there are many elements that go in the direction of regional products.'

What is more – thinking differently about the same idea of the enactive and transformative power of cheese – this initiative occasioned several learning processes. The creation of new forms of knowledge means a lot more than the acquisition of technical or practical skills and know-how. Knowledge influences how we *see* the world and changing how we *see* is a prerequisite for changing what we *do* (Carolan, 2006). New learning and understanding in marketing strategies, negotiations with trade partners, fundamental questioning as well as opportunistic thinking changed how the actors involved in the initiative saw their world. Consequently, what they saw to be unthinkable at the beginning (i.e. this whole process) became possible. The quest for better prices is progressively being replaced by one for a fairer and more sustainable industry. In other words, and referring to Marsden's (2013) recent work on reflexive governance and learning, the enrolment of the cheese specialities provoked 'awareness of and change to interpretive frameworks', which is typical of what he calls 'second order learning'. Such fundamental changes are the first conditions for the emergence of different, and hopefully more sustainable, food futures.

A THIRD ONTOLOGY AND THE ENACTIVENESS OF THE RESEARCH?

In this chapter I have identified two coexisting ontologies of a regional cheese: the market cheese and the cooperative cheese. Both are very different. Both are enacted in networks of relations through repeated processes of meaning, attribution and translation. None is truer than the other. Multiple ontologies do exist simultaneously and are all part of what is *real*. Acknowledging this co-existence of multiple ontologies allows us to 'read' for the transformative potential of new developments in food networks without dismissing any critical examination of these two ontologies: the neoliberal cheese might well introduce neoliberal logic within cooperative structures and the cooperative cheese possibly leads to a relatively conservative interpretation of food localism. Still, looking at the multiplicity of ontologies leaves room for other interpretations. None alone offers a satisfying understanding of what *is Le Grand Pré* cheese. Firstly, this opens new spaces for the *alternative* within the *conventional*, casting away a binary opposition between these two categories. Doing so, it allows imperfect actants, such as our local cheese specialities, to act as symbols of alternative values too. Secondly, this implies combining reflexivity and criticism by developing careful reflections on the impact of radical criticism. Far from naïve optimism, such positioning brings criticism one step deeper into the research process. Thirdly, by looking at the positive side of imperfect initiatives that draw on 'alternative' values, the research produces encouraging input for further developments. As nicely formulated by one of my interviewees: 'Because all these people are so interested in what we do, this means… we must be right… somewhere…' In this sense, I argue that adopting such a critically positive approach is a promising way of doing enactive research. Indeed, the fundamental question beyond these considerations, for us as scholars and researchers, is to define our particular role in this production of multiple ontologies. We cannot control the ontology we produce through our research practice as we are not the only actors involved in the process. Le Heron and Lewis put it nicely when they underline the necessity of translation: 'For acting to become enacting translation has to take place. There are multiple moments of this and we should not regard translating as only an active choice' (Le Heron and Lewis, 2011: 1). Because we cannot know how and when exactly this translation will happen, adopting an enactive research posture should firstly take place through careful reflexivity towards our contributions in the collective production of ontologies. This includes a critical examination of how we set up our research questions, how we present our research objectives and how we choose to 'read' the social processes we observe. Consequently, developing enactive research does not necessarily imply reinventing how we do research, rather it implies changing how we think about how we do research. In this sense, and as stated by the editors, it challenges the usual concepts and frameworks of research in order to do better by adopting an epistemological and theoretical orientation towards new possibilities rather than sterile pessimism.

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