



What is healthy food?

The dynamics of food identities
from the perspective of
cultural anthropology

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from the perspective of
Cultural Anthropology?**



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- specific food products or foodstuff or food practices carry specific *food identities*.
- These food identities are ascribed to food products or practices by different actors like producers, consumers, health or marketing persons, scientists etc.
- a food product or practice can have *different* health identities ascribed by different actor (groups), cultural milieus, ideas of healthiness and they can be changing over time.

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- Culture is not a side dish of eating. All eating and eating discourses are culturally determined (e.g. morally loaded). Culturality /morality doesn't "even" stop at the gates of science (Science Studies).
- Cultural Anthropology in my reading does not want to change eating habits but understand the culturality of both, those who eat and even those who try to change eating habits.



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- How **salt** succeeded to "be" healthy and unhealthy at the same time.
- How the actual "**Chia**"-Hype in Switzerland and beyond represents different, traditional and changing ideas of healthiness.
- Instead I will:
Illustrate the specific approach of Cultural Anthropology on the example of a short movie clip.



Today's example

- Woody Allen movie "The Sleeper" (1973)

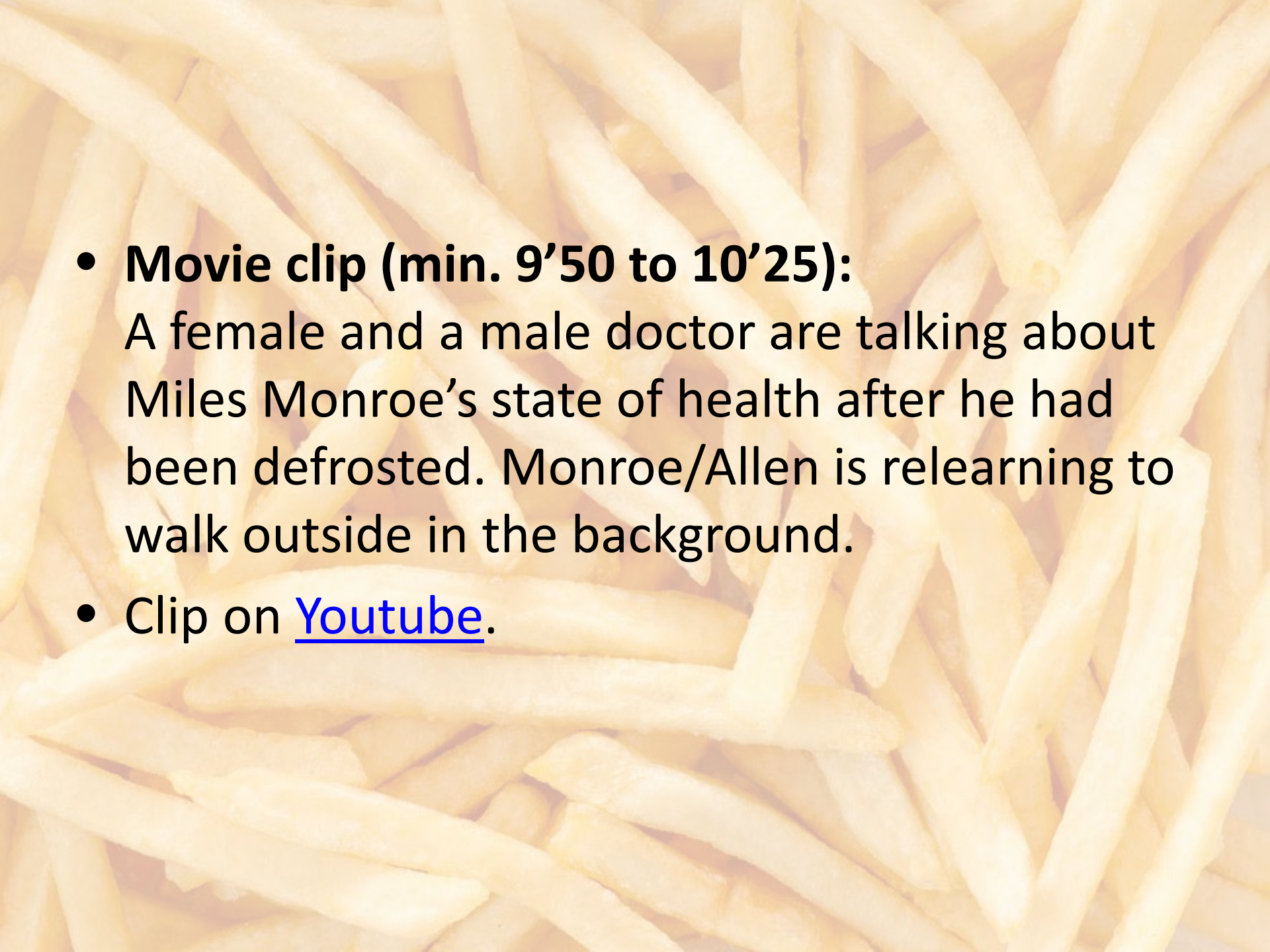
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- Woody Allen movie "The Sleeper" (1973)
- **Plot:** Miles Monroe (Woody Allen), a jazz musician and owner of the "Happy Carrot" health-food restaurant in NYC's Greenwich Village in 1973, is cryogenically frozen without his consent after a minor illness had become serious by medical treatment. He is brought back to life in 2173 – 200 years in the future. (Wikipedia/IMDB/own).

Today's example

- Woody Allen movie "The Sleeper" (1973)



- 
- **Movie clip (min. 9'50 to 10'25):**
A female and a male doctor are talking about Miles Monroe's state of health after he had been defrosted. Monroe/Allen is relearning to walk outside in the background.
 - Clip on [Youtube](#).

Clip dialogue

English

Female Doc: He's fully recovered ... except for a few minor kinks.

Male Doc: Has he asked for anything special?

Female Doc: Yes, this morning for breakfast. He requested something called wheat germ, organic honey and tiger's milk.

Male Doc: Oh yes, those were the charmed sub-stances that some years ago were felt to contain life-preserving properties.

Female Doc: You mean there was no deep fat? No steak or cream pies or hot fudge?

Male Doc: Those were thought to be unhealthy ... precisely the opposite of what we now know to be true.

Female Doc: Incredible!

Clip dialogue

Castellano

Female Doc: Se ha recuperado totalmente ... excepto en algunas peceñas manías

Male Doc: ¿Ha pedido algo especial?

Female Doc: Si, para desayunar pidió unas cosas raras que llamó "trigo germinado" ,"jalea real" y "leche de almendras".

Male Doc: Ah, sí, eran alimentos que hace muchos años se creía que contenían propiedades que alargaban la vida.

Female Doc: ¿Es que entonces no había jamón, ni solomillos, ni pasteles de crema o chocolate?

Male Doc: Creían que éso era malo para la salud, precisamente lo contrario que ahora, que sabemos que es bueno.

Female Doc: Incréible!

Clip dialogue

Deutsch

Female Doc: Er ist völlig wiederhergestellt. Das heisst, bis auf eine leichte Steifheit.

Male Doc: Hat er irgendwelche Wünsche geäussert?

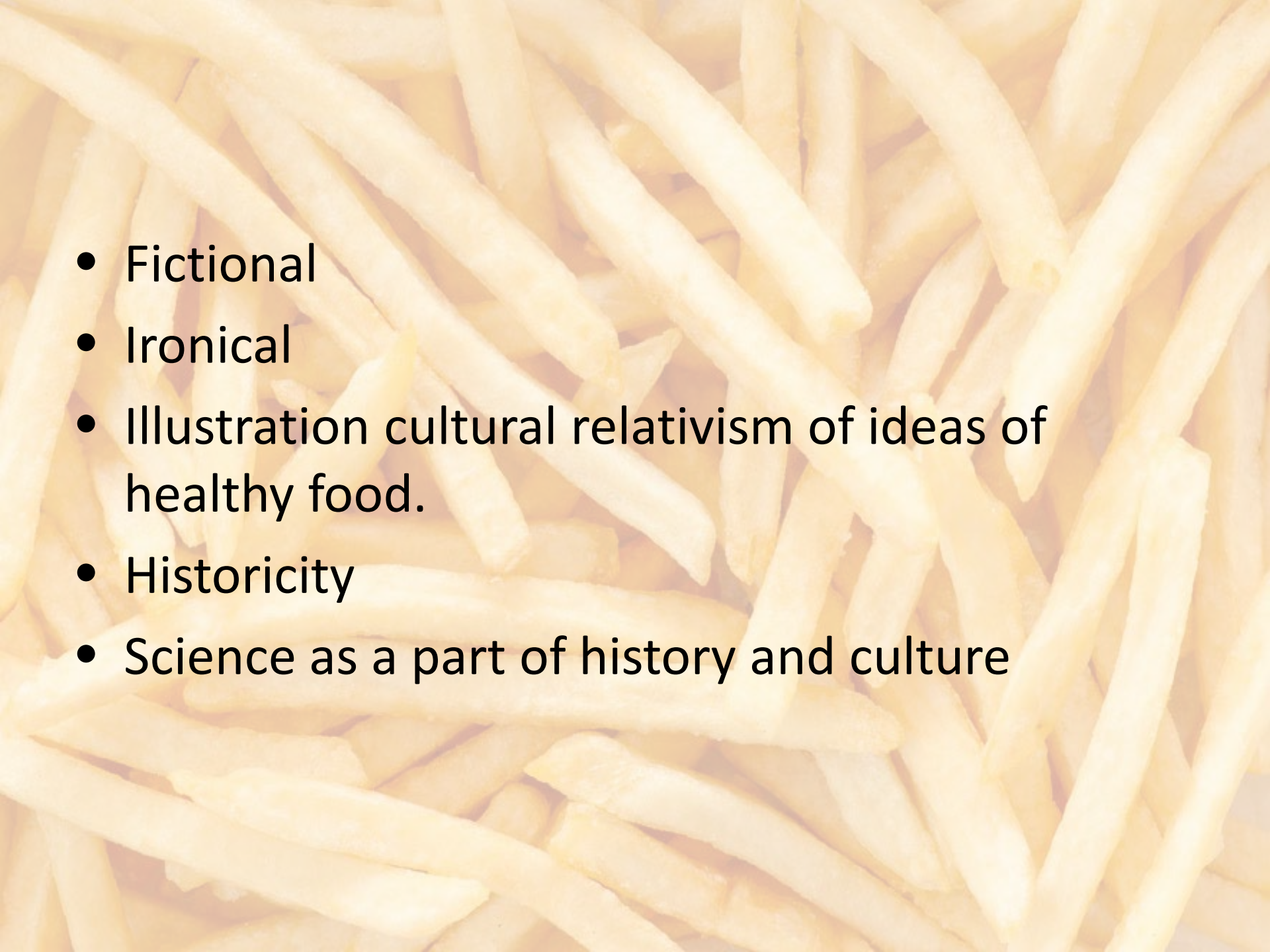
Female Doc: Ja, zum Frühstück heute morgen. Aehm, er bat um etwas, das nannte sich Weizenkeime, Vollwerthonig und Sanddornsaft-Extrakt.

Male Doc: Ach, richtig. Das waren die Zaubersubstanzen, denen man früher Leben verlängernde Eigenschaften zuschrieb.

Female Doc: Sie meinen, es gab keine gesättigten Fette, keine Schweinshaxen, keine Cremetorten? Und keine heisse Schokolade?

Male Doc: Nein, das hielt man alles für ungesund. Genau das Gegenteil von dem, was wir heute für richtig erkannt haben.

Female Doc: Unvorstellbar!

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- Fictional
 - Ironical
 - Illustration cultural relativism of ideas of healthy food.
 - Historicity
 - Science as a part of history and culture

Comparing translations

- Different synchronisations of the movie in different languages
(English/Castellano/German/French/Italian)
- Translations in subtitles diverging from audio track:
(Castellano/German/French/Italian)
- Additional languages in subtitles
(Dutch/Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish)
- Sorry! No Portuguese available for me at the moment.

Multiple reasons for differences

"Practical":

- Synchronisation according movement of lips
- Negligent translation

"Cultural":

- Understandability
- Equivalent lacking
- Cultural differences and different readings

Condensed synopsis, highlighting the main differences to the English text

	English (audio + subtitles)	Castellano (audio)	Castellano (subtitles)	Deutsch (audio)	Deutsch (subtitles)	Français (audio)	Français (subtitles)
Name of the restaurant / shop	<i>Happy Carrot health food restaurant</i>	Restaurante de comida sana	Restaurante de comida natural „La zanahoria feliz“	Vegetarisches Restaurant „Zur glücklichen Karotte“	Öko -Laden Happy Carrot	Boutique d'alimentation pour végétariens „La Carotte Joyeux“	Restaurant diététique
„Healthy“	<i>Wheat germ</i>	Trigo germinado	Germen de trigo	Weizenkeime	Weizenkeime	Flocons d'avoine (oat flakes)	Germe de blé
	<i>Organic honey</i>	Jalea real	Miel orgánica	Vollwerthonig	Biohonig	Gelée Royale	Miel bio
	<i>Tiger's milk</i>	Leche de almendras	Leche de tigre	Sanddornschaft-Extrakt (Buckthorn berry juice)	Tigermilch	Lait pantère	Lait de tigre
„Unhealthy“, not sweet	<i>Deep fat</i>	--	--	Gesättigte Fette (saturated fat)	Frittiertes	--	Graisse à frire
		Jamón				Les pâtes	
	<i>Steak</i>	Solomillos (Fillet)	Filetes	Schweinschaxen (Roasted knuckle of Pork, incl fat and bone)	Steaks	Les rôtis	Steaks
„Unhealthy“, sweet	<i>Cream pies</i>	Pasteles de crema (Pastry)	Pasteles de nata	Cremetorten	Sahnekuchen	Les crèmes chantilly	Tartes à crème
	<i>Hot fudge</i>	Pasteles de chocolate	Dulces	Heisse Schokolade	Karamellpudding	Les tartes maison	Caramel chaud

Woody Allen's 1970ies (ironical) Greenwich Village constellation of healthy food

- Health food restaurant
- Wheat germ
- Organic honey
- Specific subcultural health food "milieu" of alternative living
- Tiger's Milk
- "Tiger's Milk": (industrially produced American vitamin bar of the 1960ies)

Different translations of “health food” in “health food restaurant”

"Health food"	
Vegetarian	“Vegetarisches Restaurant” (D/a)
	“Boutique d'alimentation pour végétariens” (F/a)
Natural	“Restaurante de comida natural” (C/s)
Ecological	„Öko-Laden” (D/s)
Macrobiotic	“Ristorante macrobiotico” (I/s)
Dietetic	“Restaurant diététique” (F/s)
Reform...	“Reformwinkel” (N/s)

Different translations of “organic honey”

Organic	“Organic honey” (E), “Miele organico” (I/a) “Miel organica” (C/s) “Organische Honing” (N/s), (similar: Norsk/Suomi)
Integral	“Vollwerthonig” (D/a) , “Miele integrale” (I/s)
Biological	“Biohonig” (D/s), “Biodynamisk Honung” (S/s)
Ecological	“Okologisk honing” (Dansk/s)
(Royal Jelly)	“Gelée royale” (F/a), “Jalea real” (C/a)

Different conceptions of “healthy food” (1)

Example	Conception of healthiness
Vitamins	Containing "healthy" ingredients
Vegetarian	Containing no meat
Natural	Not processed
- Integral	Complete (nothing taken away)
- Organic	Nothing (unnatural) added
Ecological	Produced and consumed keeping the interaction with the environment in mind
Macrobiotic	Balances the “yin and yang” elements of food

Different conceptions of “healthy food” (2)

Example	Conception of healthiness
Biological	(you name it)
Dietetic	Following the ideas of (classical) dietetics
Reform	Following the ideas of a specific health movement that is in opposition to traditional food practices
(implicit in "wheat germ")	Home grown
"health food store"	Healthy because of being bought in a health food store



Different conceptions of “healthy food” (3)

- Vast variety of different possible readings of what "healthy food" could mean

Different conceptions of "unhealthy food"

- ➔ See examples on the handout
- "Unhealthy" substances: fat, meat, cream, sugar, eggs (missing: alcohol)
- "unhealthy" processing (e.g. cooking)
- "Unhealthy" calories
- "Unhealthy" richness ("deftig") ("währschaft")
- Moral "unhealthiness": indulgence, gluttony
- Regionality as "unhealthiness": fudge, jamón, Schweinshaxe, tarte maison
- Traditionality as "unhealthiness": (ibid.)

**National (regional)
conceptions of healthiness**



National (regional) conceptions of healthiness

- Personal impressions (preoccupation?)
- Need to investigate the national discourse on every mentioned dish.
- Danger of over-interpretation

National (regional) conceptions of healthiness

- Spanish / French "healthy food" less "alternative"
- North American health food more institutionalized / industrialized

National (regional) conceptions of *unhealthiness* (1)

- North American focus on unhealthiness is more on sugar and fat than e.g. traditionality.
- North American "unhealthy" dishes more urban/modern.
- European "unhealthy" dishes more rural/traditional/home made.
- North American focus more on gluttony.

National (regional) conceptions of *unhealthiness* (2)

- German focus more on fat as unhealthy.
"Schweinshaxe" (simple meat)
- Spanish focus more on refined dishes and indulgence. Jamón/Solomillos (exclusive meat)
- French focus of "unhealthy food" more on less refined dishes. "Tarte maison" (pas de "cuisine")
- Pâtes: French focus more on calories.
- German "scientific" reading of unhealthiness.
"Unsaturated fat"

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Conclusion

- Cultural Anthropology can detect the diversity of "cultures of 'healthy' eating" as a part of general food cultures and intertwined with general subcultural settings in their social, historical and symbolic dimensions.
- Cultural Anthropology, with its qualitative and inductive approach, can offer a deeper understanding of the *internal logic* of culturally diverse and opaque phenomena like "eating healthily".



Thank you for listening - and:

Enjoy your meal!