The Ethics of Taste

Principles of a Philosophy of Food or a New ›Gastrosophy‹

Food is a theme that is relatively new to cultural theory, and because a more precise look at the development of this young discourse would overreach the intended scope of this article, a few words will have to suffice to characterize this emerging discipline in order to determine the basic principles of a Philosophy of Food, or ›Gastrosophy‹. In addition, this paper will also cover the methodological aims and theoretical possibilities of the politically ethical praxis of a ›good food.‹

The Cultural Turn*: Nutrition and the Natural Sciences*

The main concern of the new discipline of Food Studies can be put in the following simple terms: it seeks to transcend the unilateral dominance of the traditional ideas of nutrition in the natural sciences that have prevailed since the 19th century. A *cultural turn* towards a different idea of nutrition was first set in motion in the 70s, as cultural sociologists in France and Great Britain began to take note of food. Then, in the 90s, Cultural Studies took up food as a part of culture. In the years past, numerous publications and organizations (some in Germany as well) have all contributed to the forming of the independent area of Food Studies, or Culinaristics. Its purpose is to overcome the common scientific, theoretical and socio-political reduction of food to its biological functions. Gastrosophy questions the common conception of food as something which merely supplies the body with ›calories‹ or ›nutrients‹ in order to ›replenish consumed energy‹.

The predominate conception of nutrition in society sees man's relationship with food, his food-being (Essistenz), and his culinary practices much the same as the model of filling up a car: Just as the vehicle's combustion engine must be refueled in order to continue operating, man too must ›refuel‹ and ›fill up‹ on nutrients when the ›machine‹ that is his body runs out of energy. The entire ›nutritional process‹ is reduced to the simple act of taking in nutrition, in terms of a ›one way supply chain‹ (from outside to inside). ›Food‹ is simply thought of in terms of being a necessary component of consumption in the external world. This view does not consider the creative and productive dimensions of food. In contrast to this, the new area of Food Studies advocates a different approach to food, one that sees the daily habits and customs of eating and

the way which we take in nutrition as a complex structure of numerous interlinked activities and techniques, societal conventions and somatic implications, social roles and every day rituals. In short: Food studies concerns itself with the rather unfamiliar idea that everyday eating and culinary practices are socially constructed and globally constitutive phenomena that form individual and societal identities and ways of life. Cultural theory is opening an entirely new research area with the ›World of Food‹, one which sees nutrition not only as a cultural practice, but also as a genuine area within Culture theory. Considering this, it seems even more remarkable that philosophy has shown no real engagement with Food Studies in its formative stages. A real philosophy of food, a Gastrosophy, is only now in its beginning stages. To that extent, in the following I would like to present a basic explanation of a philosophical approach to the questions of food and nutrition.

How Might Future Generations Live Sustainably?

One of the central themes of moral philosophy deals with ever popular Socratic questioning of how we should live, and moreover, if a better life is possible than the one we are living, a life that, through its insatiable hunger for resources, is quite literally devouring the very means of its subsistence—the environment. When considered in the context of growing problems of hunger and the disparity between the rich and the poor, the global importance of the ethical and political relevance of food is even more underscored. In this way, philosophical ethics, with its questioning of a better and good life for all can be carried over into the gastrosophical approach: Is there a ›better culinary praxis‹ than the one we are currently practicing? How should we eat; how should we change morally bad food habits, so that everyone could eat good? Or—so that one must not make two great leaps at once—is it not worth asking, in what sense the seemingly personal question of how and what one eats has any kind of moral (ethical and political) relevance?

Such *gastrosophical* questions—alluding to Kant, one could speak of questions of moral taste—are in direct contrast to the predominant sentiment in academic philosophy, for traditional philosophy feels obligated to a moral-philosophical liberalism which views food as something altogether un-philosophical. To that effect, for example, Jürgen Habermas—without a doubt one of the most prominent representatives of the prevailing Moral Philosophy—expressly calls for a

theoretical »abstinence« from the project which is laid out here of regarding everyday things, such as eating, as an object of ethical and moral thought. The prevailing philosophical abstinence from food can be traced back to the implicit, and, as we shall see, unfounded presuppositions that the moral right of individual freedom would restrict itself to a negative freedom, that it might be up to everyone to be happy in matters of ›private‹ life, at least in a morally irrelevant, popular and very personal way. This moral and theoretical abstinence and neoliberal demoralization of individual's private lives is at the heart of the ideological conception that general judgments and assertions of value regarding the ›private‹ areas of our lives are not possible. And because this conception regards that each person is left to pursue happiness in a ›subjective‹ way (as long as that same right of others is respected), the individual has no morally relevant connection to the happiness of others. In this way of thinking, a moral-philosophical approach to the question how well we eat is not even possible. This moral-philosophical neutrality and gastrosophical nihilism is, in the face of the global food crisis—and who would refute this?— *patently false*. A demoralization of the predominant taste of society is also philosophically unsustainable; unless and until one realizes that a general theory of ethically good food is absolutely able to be founded. This can be seen in perhaps the most well known example of the philosophical justification of not eating meat from animals killed solely for the purpose of food, which has a long history. The recently popular ethical vegetarian debate stretches back from Peter Singer to Rousseau and even further back to Plato and Pythagoras and the beginnings of western philosophy. And just so that there are no misunderstandings: The gastrosophical question of ›good food‹ does not solely occupy itself with the pros and cons of eating meat. However, inherent in this moral abstinence from eating meat is a central concern of a nutritionally ethical way of thinking. It is shown, for example, that the difficulty with the idea of a culinary reason ultimately exists to a lesser extent in the moral and theoretical justification of a good for all (with the good here being a vegetarian cuisine for the sake of animals and humans). In the face of the global hunger crisis and obviously poor nutritional, the food problem concerns itself not with theory, rather primarily with practice—that is the necessity of a global proliferation of not just ethically better nutritional and culinary practices, but also food practices that are good in and of themselves.

Of course, the difficulty of the everyday realization of these ethically good eating practices lies in the fact that is its normative justifications and moral-theoretical truths are of oppositional worldviews—and in our post-metaphysical age these truths and oppositional worldviews remain unavoidable. Yet this historical and societal Fallibilism of the good does not argue the universalism of these kinds of practices, rather if marks the Achilles' heel of every post-metaphysical, but non-relativistic morality, whose partisanship for the good of everyone cannot be justified without ›divine law‹ (Heidegger). As a result, a philosophical ethics of food (as a theory) should be made up of direly needed practices of gastrosophical reason (an ethics of living). What else would be capable of and be called to such a task? In other words: contemporary philosophy should face up to its social responsibility of developing the theoretical principles of such an ethics and politics of good global food praxis, instead of avoiding this undelegable and necessary task without any real reason for doing so at all.

The Crossdisciplinary Essence of the Food World

So, then, what is a philosophy of food, or a Gastrosophy? The idea dates back to the author and scholar Eugen von Vaerst. In his writings from the mid 19th century, he posits seven areas of Gastrosophy: »1) The Teachings of the Joys of Food. 2) Theory and Praxis of the Culinary Arts. 3) The Aesthetics of Eating. 4) Physiology and Chemistry of All Edible Substances and Creatures as well as Most Drinks. 5) The Principles of (good) Table Manners. 6) The Study of Dietetics, a Critical Casuistry of Anorexia and Obesity. 7) The strictly regulated control of all social and economic means of production (*ex cathedra)*, such as cattle breeding, gardening, fishing, farming, hunting, et cetera, that are not absolutely necessary for the nourishment that humans rely on for survival, but also those that serve the well-being of an individual, for whom the meal is a celebration and feast of already prepared dishes and noble drinks in a creative fulfillment of a metaphysical need.« Without having to accept all of the tenets individually, von Vaerst's categorization makes the substance of ›Gastrosophy‹ much clearer: A philosophical theory of food takes on the complex task of attempting to bring all of the relevant sides of the food world into view, in that it is concerned just as much with the global impact of every aspect of nutrition as it is with the everyday trifles of culinary habits and customs. Gastrosophy recognizes the philosophical in food amidst the apparent irrelevance and triviality. By means of a

methodological system which gets at the real truth behind the world of food, knowledge can be gained of that which will here be referred to as the *culinary circle*. This means that a philosophical approach to food goes far beyond a scientific understanding of nutrition, but, also beyond a purely culturally and theoretically centered view, insofar as it takes into account all the diverse economical, political, animal-ethical, agricultural, and industrial everyday practical and aesthetic worldviews of food. In other words: Gastrosophy nurtures a food philosophical consciousness that studies the all of the factors of truth of how the world is eaten. The ›food chain‹, or the culinary circle, revolves around these gastrosophical truths that make the daily act of eating not a completely personal matter, but instead a life praxis with global impact.

In addition to the methodology of the culinary circle, a philosophical approach to nutrition also takes advantage of a wide spectrum of themes. It realizes the previously indicated set of circumstances, namely that food is a normatively mined area and that its ultimately unjustifiable truth remains a heated point of contention in society. It is clear that there are numerous volatile issues we face in the future that are sparked by the questions of food and nutrition, for example the problems of social justice and the blatant disproportionateness between the satiety in the first world and hunger in the third world, or the environmental crisis of industrial agricultural capitalism and its ecological impacts and aftereffects. Moreover, right now there are also major developments in biotechnology with the genetic manipulation of nutrition, plants and animals. In other words, whether in respect to the different means of agricultural production, technocratic or other alternative solutions for world hunger, whether in relation to agricultural treaties and agreements, or the questions of who cooks and what tastes good, which foods and diets are healthy, where one shops and where one should not—every aspect of food is unavoidably pervaded with normative judgments and morally relevant implications of global impact. Out of the complex and volatile nature of food questions arises the corollary that a gastrosophical, or any other (scientific, cultural, life-worldly) food discourse cannot be free of judgment. To that effect, Bertolt Brecht's old materialistic and antagonistic saying »First comes food, then morality« can be corrected for today's more affluent world by saying: *Food is moral, whether we find this tasty or not.*

In order to reasonably be able to navigate the volatile area of taste in society, full of interests and

normative conceptions, Gastrosophy is able to make use of the focus on diversity and ethics that has developed over the last few decades in many fields concerned with food, and the idea of better food. This can be seen, for example, in international environmental and agricultural sciences developing „environmentally ethical" practices that are verified in everyday farming by bio-farming groups. This can be seen in political science and in the numerous forums of civil society concepts of a ›socially just‹ approach to nutrition. Also, a ›fair world market‹ and ›ethical global economics‹ are finding much needed support, for example in the relatively new field of ›consumer ethics‹. In the Nutritional Sciences, research is being carried out on nutrition-related diseases, in order to develop ›healthier kinds of food‹, and by engaging in discourse with other related fields, general standards of a ›good diet‹ are becoming clear. Questions of taste are found in the *Haute-Cuisine,* and in the ›new gourmets‹ of the international S*low Food* and *Food Justice* Movements, who bring a culinary aesthetics and hedonism to the table, and whose ethical knowledge of food comes from cultivated experience in everyday food's ›good taste‹. My point is here, that *gastrosophical ethics is composed of all of these different aspects of ›good food‹.* Thus, the task of a ›philosophical study of good food‹ lies in the crossdisciplinary and encyclopedic synthesizing the morally and theoretically relevant aspects of the individual fields of food knowledge.

The deciding factor is that any philosophy of food that does not base itself on all of these various disciplines would not then be able to manage the immense and bountiful fields of knowledge of a better food for the world, nor would it be able to justify what the ethically good in each of the particular situations is. Nevertheless, research from across all of these fields shows that philosophy's antiquated doing it alone is completely unnecessary, in order to establish the necessary arguments for a gastrosophically ideal reason. For a generally applicable, ›objective‹ and interdisciplinary founding of ethically and politically better approaches to nutrition, it is imperative that philosophy sets itself down at the table with the other *already established* fields to bring real insight to the actual possibilities of a better food for the world, in order to unify these still disparate ethical areas and food world views into *one concept.* This concept I call ›*gastrosophical ethics*‹ or ›*gastrosophical Reason*‹.

Philosophy, however, is in fact capable of carrying this concept out without claiming to have any

greater importance, in the Hegelian sense, than any of the other disciplines. Admittedly, such a program opens up a vast field of gastrosophical studies, at which point the only thing that remains is for one is to make the leap and to suppose that, which will have to be addressed in many detailed studies and field-related research: namely that the normative claims of a universal ethics and politics of ›good food‹ is in fact justifiable, and therefore, while the talk of a ›gastrosophical reason‹ is without a doubt something unfamiliar, it is, in actuality, something strongly grounded in every sense of the word.

Special Nature of Eating Practices as Ethical Areas

Let us then posit, even in a postmodern time of moral-theoretical relativity, that the normative concept of good in the area of food can actually be post-metaphysically, scientifically and objectively determined. The next step in the argument would then be to determine, in addition to the philosophical and the worldly habits of thought, all of the other general factors that make questions of food and nutrition matters of everyday ethics. In particular, there are two historical factors that account for the special nature of our existence (Existenz) and our being-with-food, or ›Essistenz‹ as an ethically relevant matter in life. At the same time, an other important characteristic of a philosophical approach to the (theory of) table company becomes clear: namely the *emancipatory* (normative-universal) orientation of the gastrosophical as a *praxis of freedom*. A gastrosophical study and thinking of food argues for and substantiates a philosophy of freedom in the sense of an everyday, practical, culinary self-determination.

One factor is the economic development over the second half of the 20th century, which has led to an expansion of remarkable affluence in society: for the first (and perhaps only) time in world history, and thanks to a secure supply and wide selection of goods and material conditions at their disposal, a large number of consumers in rich countries have the freedom to eat what they want.

Another factor are the societal processes of individualization occurring during the same period that have also provided for an idealistic emancipation from generally obligatory eating customs: today hardly any eating practice is prescribed by cultural tradition, religion, class or gender. That is not to say that these facets of a traditional habit of customs have lost any kind of empirical meaning, but in those areas where these do exist, we must recognize them and incoporate them into a philosophy of self-nourishment, maintained and renewed on a daily basis. These two

historical factors—material affluence and alimentary (food-related) freedom—provide the background as to why our everyday contact with food can no longer be an empire of taste and necessity, and why it should become an aesthetic empire of freedom.

In this particularly unique everyday culinary self-determination occurs the fulfillment of an ancient and inter-cultural dream of man—the dream of a ›life in paradise‹, or in a ›cockaigne‹: the dream of a never-ending supply and lasting fill of food. Such a paradise-like Cockaigne is manifested in every ›supermarket‹ with the colorful luxuriousness of fully-stocked shelves and an endless selection of goods at affordable prices. It is well known who lives in this Cockaigne and who is the subject of this fortune: ›we‹, the consumers of the rich countries of the north. With our daily eating habits and customs, we alone decide how important food and nutrition are to us, which kinds of practical importance we assign to the culinary aspects in everyday life, where we shop, when and how much we eat, what we nourish ourselves with, whom we dine with, how often, in what form and so on. In stark contrast to many other areas of our lives, in which a comparatively self-deterministic art of living is not prescribed, or is not possible, our approach to nutrition becomes the inconspicuous means of an everyday praxis of freedom. And only in the context of this societal factor of an individual's freedom of food choices does it make sense, to found principles of food ethics and to reflect the theme of food's normativeness critically in the sense of a moral-philosophical universalism.

We are also to read an additional specification of human nutrition in the fact of this freedom, and in the resulting possibility of an ideal reason of a gastrosophical ethics. In practicing our freedom of nutrition, the ›whole world‹ (of food) is present at ›every meal‹: every act of eating decides how we deal with the questions of food and nutrition; at every meal we are taking a position on the inherently connected individual and global issues and their ethically and politically relevant implications. For the reality of our relationship with nutrition deals with nothing other than the totality of all individual acts of eating which take place all across the world on a day-to-day basis.

Brief Genealogy of the Traditional Morality of Diet

This poses the question why the most affluent countries place so little value on an ethics of good food. Why do we use our freedom of nutritional choices to live a life of the »malbouffe« (in the words of the French farmer and gastrophilosopher José Bové), or »junk food«? I would argue that

at the root of the prevailing culture's moral taste of bad food is a hardly questioned nutritional-philosophical concept, which stems from the same way of thinking that has taught abstinence from culinary pleasures, and which has devalued food as a possible means of practicing an ethically responsible life. For this reason, I would like to give a brief genealogical look at what I call the traditional *morality of diet* is, to look behind the prevailing societal mentality towards food. That will require showing how the philosophical cold shoulder towards food is anything other than understandable. From the beginnings in ancient Greece, to roman stoicism and medieval Christianity, and to modern and contemporary philosophy, great thinkers throughout the ages have concerned themselves quite intensively with food.

At the center of this traditional philosophy of food is, however, is a clear world-wide vilification of the life of culinary pleasures. A metaphysics first developed by Plato and influenced by Christian morality, then taken up by Kant has developed a dualistic and rationalistic anthropology that splits beings into two categories: a self-nourishing, ›low‹ and ›sensual‹ beings, and the ›higher‹, ›rational beings‹ with a mind capable of reason. With the help of this metaphysical polarization the discourse of a morality of diet can place the ›satisfaction of one's body's needs‹ in the area of biological necessities, as something involuntary, animalistic and contrary to reason. Then it would be possible for a philosophical moral of diet to establish a metaphysical contempt of the body and ascetic hostility towards pleasure. Classic rationalism has always claimed that, next to the sensuality of sexuality, the culinary lusts of food (and drink) is the biggest threat to humanity's reason. For while the spirit of the mind and the moral make it possible for man to use both his freedom and his reason, according to a morality of diet, man acts on his ›body's necessities‹ and ›sensual desires of pleasure‹ and displays a lack of freedom for an irrational pleasure. As such, traditional philosophy's anorexic morality can be summarized thusly: The day to day contact with food—acquiring it, preparing it and eating it—is ›good‹ only as a means of sustaining life on a functional and physical level, but the diet itself does not belong to the central and moral essence of what it is to be human . He who considers culinary pleasures as a constitutive part of a good life (the praxis of living the good life), instead of practicing an ascetic ideal, – like Epicurus – would be said to be living a completely false life beyond any reason. For this person and his hedonistic philosophy would be demonstrating an insufficient ability to master

his body, instead, he would demonstrate the virtue of a morally just nutrition that consists of a purely functional diet and moderate cuisine. Through the influence of western eating habits and customs, philosophy's morality of diet has spread to all peoples throughout the various stages of civilization. Therefore, it seems to be quite understandable that in today's society the things we eat and drink and ways we eat and dink them are of very little (ethical and political) importance, and that the problems of food, hunger and eating habits can be dismissed as unimportant in relation to the ›bigger questions‹ of our life.

Furthermore, the western culture's philosophical (anti-gastrosophical) concept of food is, in fact, dominated by yet another value judgment: That of the compromising linkage of food with ›women's work in the kitchen‹. In addition to the traditional vilification and repression, then, there is also a patriarchal power structure. The history of our culinary culture is founded on an understanding of the sexes that delegates the chores and above all food preparation to women. This is a centuries old way of thinking has denied everything that happens in the kitchen any societal recognition; it relegates culinary practices to a simple everyday necessity of the private sphere of feminine domesticity. In the ›gendered linkage‹ between the woman and the stove there is a fundamental cause for the philosophical neglect and debasing of culinary arts as a possible life praxis of a gender-free everyday ethics. Up to this point in history, ›men‹ have generally not done the cooking; if anything they have been interested in the food: That is the food that has already been prepared—and guess who more than likely prepared it.

In short: the classical dietetics, by means of devaluing food in two key ways— rationalistic and patriarchal world views—has created the up till now practically unvetted basis of the predominate consciousness of food in the world. The ethical and political question of deciding at which point and with which strategies these hegemonic eating habits can be changed and improved on can be and must be taken on by philosophy: as the classical morality of diet is diametrically opposed to a gastrosophical way of thinking. By doing so, both the everyday personal and global matters of our eating practices can be elevated to an ethics and politics of food.

Politics of Food

A gastrosophical way of thinking is, of course, just one step of a real change of the currently popular taste, a change which needs an according set of practices. First of all, improving the

prevailing ideas about food depends greatly on *politics*. It depends on the elected officials and other key players who decide a great deal of what happens in the worlds of food and nutrition covered here, with governmental and international legislation and regulation. Because of the enormous influence of politics on things like agriculture, world economy, food safety laws and standards, social life, health, research and so on, the normative conflicts in the individual areas are usually political in nature. In light of this *political heteronomy of the food question,* that is the small chance of a good politics in the gastrosophical sense, there is little that can otherwise be done in each of these areas without political action. But no matter how extensive or intensive politics influences the ways that we nourish ourselves: improving society's predominate culinary practices depends neither solely nor most importantly on ›others‹, that is on the politicians and on the capitalists of the international food companies. The political and economic powers of the global food chain are not capable of anything without the people, not without the so-called ›consumers‹ and their decisions.

Here the irreducible countervailing power of the subjects comes in. For just as politics cannot govern without the participation of the subjects, and just as the capital cannot make money without its clients, so too can daily dicisions what we buy and eat have an effect on the respective political and economic power structures. Our freedom to be able to choose for ourselves what we eat can help to set real boundaries for politicians and food concerns. That is why the everyday inconspicuous act of eating a meal is so interesting, and so promising, because in principal, everyone is given the possibility of activating an *ethical power of self* to change their own way of life, thereby making a change in the inextricably connected global web of food. Everyone is capable of having a seemingly small, although, in reality, an immeasurable impact in an area of their life that is often sneered at and commonly regarded as not befitting reason. Even though it might sound absurd and, it goes against the popular taste in society, it must be said that, because of its normativeness, and the global and moral implications, eating is always *a political act*; our day-to-day decisions about food, whether conscious or thoughtless, when thought all the way through, actually do impact the world—for better or for worse.

Political Shopping

What would the praxis of applying our (food related) freedom to the realization of a

gastrosophical reason require? In the following, I will discuss three such connected aspects of an everyday ethics, which are the practices, or virtues: the mature and political consumer, creative cooking and the convivial pleasure of the ritually shared meal.

For an example of what is meant here by the virtue of becoming an intelligent consumer, one is reminded of one of the lesser known scenes from the origins of western philosophy, where Socrates poses as a gastrosopher ahead of his time. The scene takes place in a market in Athens where Socrates stops a fellow citizen as he unassumingly passes by engaging him in a philosophical discussion, in which Socrates asks about the selection of different kinds of food available. With his unusual question about the habits of shopping he makes an aspect of everyday life into a philosophical theme that was completely forgotten immediately afterwards: no well-known philosopher, since Socrates, has elevated the buying of groceries to a subject of theoretical thought. Instead, if at all, philosophers like Marx concerned themselves solely with aspects of economic production—that is the economical production as well as the political distribution of food and the work that makes it possible. Socrates, however, does not ask directly about the production of consumer goods or about the work force, or about the socio-philosophical problems of their exploitation or alienation. He asks about the buying power, and with that he more so problematizes the social connections between individual consumer practices and political economy. By asking where people shop, Socrates draws attention to an aspect of their behavior, an aspect that is normally regarded as somewhat trivial, but an aspect that is, in fact, a very important matter: namely the everyday sources of the global economic process. And these sources are not made up of the workers and the producers, the masses or the proletariat; rather it is the consumers, and the masses of culinarians and their choice of food: it is the everyday act of reaching for the grocery shelf, carried out at least a million times a day almost everywhere in the world. Every selection from the shelf of goods and every purchase implies a manifold of constitutive aspects of the world of food.

The seemingly trivial act of shopping is, in fact, an immensely important act with global and philosophical implications, for with every purchase and every time we consume goods, we pull on the innumerable strings of the web of the global economy. In doing so, we weave our own part of the web of global-impact, and this makes every shopping trip an inherently philosophical act,

through which we are connected, on an ethically and politically relevant level, with the worlds of agriculture, stock breeding and natural resources, farmer's working conditions, trade structures and freight transport, advertising and nutrition industries, health standard and food safety laws, as well as food preparation and questions of taste. How can one shop rationally? Gastrosophical reason, then, as it is practiced in today's world by those who avoid purchasing the cheapest possible means of nutrition in order to experience the pleasure of socially and environmentally just produced means of nutrition. Maturity and smart consumption are shown by choosing the ›right‹ products—right in the gastrosophical sense. It is far more the underestimated buying power, and not the work force so thematized by political philosophy, that can both create societal realities and do away with them; it is buying power that is capable of usurping governmental policies by an everyday set of ethically and politically motivated praxei. In this way the subject of a wise buy can become the mature subject of the world economy, as well as a political consumer who turns the culinary circle in a rational direction. In other words: The question of which food-goods to select and why, first brought up by Socrates, pursues the critical and educational intention of making us aware of our ethical and cosmopolitan buying power, and what implications follow from it.

Creative Cooking

Just as anyone who goes shopping, and does not just allow himself to be bought, ensures all of the inherent power structures, which are inherent in the ability to freely choose how things are produced and which things are produced, and which are not, – creative cooking also provides a sovereign gain of power in relation to the world. By cooking one's food oneself, and not leaving the cooking to others—often un-paid or poorly paid—one can take more control over the decisions that ultimately determine what one eats and incorporates. A broad spectrum of culinary self-determination opens itself up on this easily accessible level. By dismissing the usual disengagement and culinary disinterestedness, caused in part by the daily nourishment of food prepared by others (by any means) and by viewing work in the kitchen as a personal life praxis beyond all traditional gender-roles, a gastrosophical developmental process is initiated that culminates in the ability to cook for yourself. For the cooking self engages itself in a creative compositional praxis that objectifies itself in its contact with various culinary aspects. Through

this reification, the cooking self is able to realize and to appropriate its own culinary life forces. Just as here the production directly involves the consumption of the product, the object, that is the created food, also directly involves the direct engagement of the *creative individuality* of the cook, the practitioner of the culinary arts who also goes through a developmental process, providing valuable lessons learned which at the same time can be applied to improving one's culinary praxis.

In contrast to eating food made by strangers, cooking for yourself removes the foreign element of culinary heteronomy. The (practical) unity of the ingredients objectified in preparation together with the pleasure of enjoying them underlies the synthesis of the cooking with that which is being cooked; that the culinary self *is* creative (and itself active) and achieves the complete enjoyment of being in itself. When one cooks for oneself, a sense of good taste is developed which is measured with the exact same standards aesthetically, morally and politically. As a human activity, in which the culinary self is constantly in a state of development, making your own food—in the sense of Marx' humanism—proves to be the epitome of a free and independent way of life. In other words: In the everyday acts of making and enjoying one's own food the individual freedom and power of a self-determined culinary life is lived to its fullest.

Pleasure of Conviviality

The third virtue of an ethics of good food concerns the convivial pleasure of sharing the ritual meal. Far more than with shopping or cooking, the pleasures of the palate, and of a shared meal are at the heart of the popular idea of a ›good life‹. According to such an idea, the pleasure of a delicious meal is both a shared and a self-serving one. While the philosophical morality of diet opposes this hedonism, seeing nothing in it other than unhealthy and uncontrolled gluttony, Gastrosophy, on the other hand, takes it seriously as an *idea of universal happiness* and a general human value judgment. No matter what the philosophical concept of what the good life is, it seems to include the collective pleasure of enjoying delicious food together with friendly and sociable people, or, in Kant's word, »the good meal in good company«. The general good of pleasant table company is founded in the fact that it goes far beyond just the immediate pleasure of nourishing the body. It has the essential purpose of culinary pleasure: these people present have gathered themselves to practice a convivial way of life in the form of a shared meal. This

makes every coincidental or functional meal with others (like business dinners, lunches) something fundamentally different than a simple gathering of people to eat a good meal just for their own sake.

The gastrosophical ritual of the meal, as a daily praxis in life, doesn't have anything in common with an especially elaborate feast or the occasional banquet. The gastrosophical meal is much more a habitual everyday meal, whose only ethical requirement lies in the self fulfilling purpose of serving a lust for life, that is enjoyed in the company of others (that is, at least two). Sharing an everyday meal with others, where the (self prepared) creations come to the table, grants the personal art of cooking (a habitualization, forming of customs) its first lasting sense and purpose of a *life art* that serves the culinary and convivial good. Ethically good eating culture is realized in the gastrosophical ritual of the meal.

The gastrosophical table company does not only offer the conviviality of cooking for one another and sharing the pleasure of enjoying the food, but it also provides for an otherwise free and inter-subjective judging of taste. The shared meal realizes an irreplaceable communal judgment and praxis of (aesthetic) refection on taste. Because there is no objective judgment or final say of what ›good taste‹ actually is, there is only one way, to use the relativism of a purely subjective and personal taste. This is the shared meal, where matters of taste contend with each other, providing for consensus (or dissent) on the generally applicable culinary-aesthetic judgments. Accordingly, there is an individual process of development that takes place through the succeeding of good everyday culinary practices—in the sense of Kantian aesthetics of taste, one could say— a sensus aetheticus culinarius, a communal sense of aesthetical taste. It is in this way that the gastrosophical ritual of the meal brings about an aesthetic refinement of the general sense of ›good taste‹, and it provides the delightful experience of the good culinary life, or –again, in Kant's words—the »joy of civilized bliss«.

In the conviviality of sharing in the ritual meal it becomes clearer—and more sensuous—than in the act of shopping and cooking, that a gastrosophical ethics is a way of good living, because the practice of sharing meals makes the rational pleasure of good food able to be experienced in a *pleasant form*. However, the virtues of intellegent shopping and daily cooking and their ethical individual and global implications form the essential elements of a civilized joy of dining. The

political ethics of a good world food finds the concept of a gastrosophical capability of reason in the everyday practices of this hedonistic pleasure that everyone is just as able to activate in praxis, as they might actually want to put into praxis—that is a way that everyone would also *like to live*. Let us then reject the philosophical diet of morality that continues to prescribe us a still unfounded abstinence from the tangible possibility of a rational and good food, and let us make use of our unique freedom to protect our right to be gastrosophers and join each other at the table. One could then perhaps imagine that in the future the philosophical representation of a festive group of fellow diners would also validate the food that is *eaten*, and not just the witty conversation that is carried on at the table, as with Plato's *Symposium*. (Thus, one should consider the fact that Plato's *Symposium,* which together with the Christian Last Supper, has had an enormous influence in the history of western culture, is blatantly *anti-gastrosophical*.) Likewise, the gastrosophical image of a ›good dining party‹ and human conviviality would not primarily focus on the *Eros* – the ultimate goodness or ‹god› of friendship and love, as in Plato; with the same passion it would, however, focus on the fellow diners subtle and wise talk of *Gastros*—the ›god of good food‹.

(translation by Jason Baumer)