

CHEF CELEBRITIES, FOODSTUFF ANXIETIES AND (UN)HAPPY MEALS

An Introduction to Foodways Redux

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In August this year I bought a hot dog at the annual city festival in Malmö, Sweden. This trivial activity would have been soon forgotten if it were not for the fact that the person who sold it to me was the actor Allan Hyde, better known as the vampire Godrick in the TV series “True Blood.” He had taken some time off, leaving Hollywood to fulfill his dream of making high quality sausages. He had started a street food business with an associate, and proudly told me that not only were the sausages handmade and organic, but the bread, mustard, catsup, and remoulade sauce that accompanied it, as well. The one I chose was called “Grandmother’s homemade pork sausage,” based on a traditional recipe. What is the cultural context in which a renowned actor dreams of becoming a sausage maker? And why does he spend his time trying to convince the festival visitors about the quality and value of tradition, handmade, and organic? This issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* attempts to answer such questions by serving ethnographies of contemporary foodways, trying to take the temperature of the hot field of food and eating.¹

Food and eating undergo significant change much as do other realms of social life. Cooking, until recently considered as the most basic, and for many also the most boring part of household work, has achieved a new status. TV shows have turned chefs into celebrities, and the previously hidden world and language of the fine cuisine has entered the homes of millions of people. Food and cooking have become

an integrated part of the lifestyle and entertainment industries. Both restaurants and homes have become stages where ideals of sensory experiences and joyful communality are performed and negotiated (Ashley et al. 2004; Jönsson 2012a).

But food is certainly not always enjoyment and community. Anxieties, fears, and hostility are as intimately connected with food as the joyful meal. It has been noted that most eating disorders come from a wish to control difficult relations with the surrounding world (Bordo 1992). Further anxieties arise from the complexities of contemporary food systems. The industrialized food system has made the transformation of plants and animals into food-stuffs and meals into a complex process where the individual consumer can rarely overlook the process or know the origins of the food on the plate. It has been argued that contemporary consumers are therefore more scared of eating than previous generations, in spite of the advanced systems for food security that have dramatically decreased the number of food poisonings (Fonte 2002; Östberg 2003). James Watson and Melissa Caldwell (2005: 3) describe how behaviors that not long ago were considered to be signs of mental instabilities, such as rigorously reading lists of ingredients, double rinsing vegetables and throwing slightly damaged fruits in the waste bin, have turned into normal procedures in many Western middle-class homes.

The changing nature of the foodscape can make it

difficult to navigate. Claude Fischler (1988) warned us many years ago that rapid changes in the food system may lead to “gastro-anomie,” a state where food loses its meaning in both individual and social life. The point that it is difficult to navigate in a world where we are daily served an abundance of food opportunities is certainly well grounded. Turning on the television one gets recipes for tasty meals, checking e-mails means being bombarded with spam offering a slimmer body by some diet with creative combinations of letters, and in front of the dairy counter at the nearby supermarket one has over a hundred varieties of yoghurt to choose between. But the abundance of choices does not necessarily lead to a lack of meaning. On the contrary, the articles in this issue show some striking examples of how food is the basis for the creation of meaning in everyday life.

This special issue brings together work from younger scholars, presenting new angles to a realm of ethnological research with considerable research history: food. The ambition is to showcase new work that is being done in the study of food and culture. From cheese and wine with labels of origin, to the social dimensions of eating cake and organic apples and berries in homes and restaurants, the articles encompass a broad span of food and food-related activities. While only Ester Bardone is working with historical sources as empirical material, all of the articles address questions of what historical processes lie behind the increased interest in food-related activities. Why do people spend time in the forest picking berries or mobilize resources to find traditional cheese when cheaper varieties are easily available in the nearest supermarket? Why do consumers spend time in front of their computers chatting with the supplier of organic apples on the other side of the world? How can the seemingly trivial practice of eating cake in Norway have turned into an act of anxiety? By bringing such questions to the table, the articles provide perspectives on the dynamics of contemporary food consumption and production, and their effects and meanings in everyday life. This introduction aims to put the articles in context by giving an overview of the research field and the main research questions they are dealing with.

The Study of Food and Culture

Food as a field of study has long traditions among the disciplines within cultural sciences. Until recently, there has been a tendency among researchers specialized in food studies to complain about the low status of food within academia.² This should not, however, be interpreted as if food has been a white field in the study of culture. While the British anthropologist David Sutton recalls how a discussion on whether food studies was a legitimate academic pursuit or “scholarship-lite” was held as late as 2000 (Sutton 2001: 3), and while I was kindly advised by a senior scholar to broaden my field of study to other topics than food if I wanted to have an academic career after finishing my doctorate with a cultural analysis of milk in 2005, one need only recall names such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Marvin Harris or Sidney Mintz to be reminded how central thinking with and about food has been to cultural theorizing. As with other fields, the interest from scholars has been going up and down. Some research questions have been abandoned, while others have emerged. The rising status of food in society has had a positive effect on the recruitment of a new generation of scholars. Food is now one of the most dynamic research areas in the humanities and social sciences, often in tight interdisciplinary collaborations with researchers in areas as diverse as public health, sensory studies, economics and agricultural studies.

European ethnology has arguably worked with food since surveys on the habits of the “folk” were first done a long time ago. As a more modern example, a working group on food ethnology within SIEF was founded in 1970 and its first conference was held in Lund, Sweden (Bringéus & Wiegelmann 1972). In recent years, a generational shift in ethnological food research has occurred (see Lysaght & Skjelbred 2010; Lysaght 2012), and the average age of the participants at the working group conferences has dropped dramatically. In 2012, the nineteenth SIEF Ethnological Food Research Conference was back in Lund where it began. Several of the articles in this issue are based on research presented at the conference, with the theme “The return of tradition-

al food.” The authors are, for the most part, in the early phases of their academic careers. Hence this issue is also a way of introducing a research field that attracts new research talents to ethnology and anthropology.

In retrospect, two major tendencies can be noted in ethnological food research. One is about food itself, or rather the origin and impact of certain dishes. Regional and local specialties have been mapped, their origin and spread in different geographic areas and contexts have been analyzed. The documentation of local practices of cooking and preservation, threatened by modernity, industrialization and globalization was an important motive for generations of scholars. The mission to map and document threatened traditions survived in ethnological food research long after the majority of scholars had moved in other directions. But the interest for the geographic spread of certain foodstuffs also provoked a more general interest for the transformation of food in different spatial, social and historical contexts. The term ‘foodways’ has been used to try to encapsulate “the patterns that establish what we eat, how and why, and under what circumstances” (Guptill, Copelton & Lucal 2013: 5). The term has been used at least since the New Deal in the USA in documentation projects initiated by the Roosevelt administration. During World War II it was an important part of the wartime committee on food habits headed by Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, as well as for Don Yoder within the framework of folk-life studies in the USA. Jay Anderson (1972) highlighted foodways as a conceptual model for food research that took into account the interrelated system of food shared by members of a particular society, including procurement, distribution, preservation, preparation, consumption, and nutrition. He also pointed out that the term already from the start had been used with a twofold aim: to examine the relationship of foodways to other cultural configurations as well as for developing methods and techniques for modifying (rural) food habits. From the beginning, the study of food has been a field where anthropologists and ethnologists have found themselves to be of interest for authorities and governments, calling

for ethical discussions of the implications of applied research (Jönsson 2012b).

The second focus has been the social event of eating, the meal. Food has always been a medium that has created bonds between people (Belasco 2008: 2; Counihan 1999: 96). Pasi Falk (1994) has argued that the eating community and the meal comprise the basic foundation of all societies. The original human community, the kin, was based on mutual obligations to ensure the feeding of all members of the kin, hence there is no culture without food. Everyday life is filled with acts related to eating communities. The intent to start a relationship is often marked by an invitation to share a meal. Inviting a neighbor for a cup of coffee or asking a potential partner out for dinner are a few examples of food’s role as a social lubricant (Valeri 1996). But food and meals are also sources of numerous conflicts. To reject an invitation to share a meal is considered a hostile act, as it is seen as a way of rejecting a social relation, and one of the most common causes of domestic violence is conflict over the preparation and serving of meals (DeVault 1991).

In few places, the normative and the performative are as far apart as at the dinner table (Wilk 2010). The happy family sharing a good home-cooked meal, joking or sharing difficult moments at work or school is a strong norm, but far away from reality in many families. But the dream is still there, as well as the vision that in other places (Northern Europeans heavily romanticize Italy and France), or in other times (the “good old 1950s”), everyone had cordial meals every day.

Meals are not only events for eating and socializing, but also good to think with. Mary Douglas (1972) showed, in her influential article “Deciphering a Meal,” how the different components of a meal and the way of eating it reflect fundamental values in society, a theme that has inspired many studies of meals. Assessing the regional spread and historical development of foodways, as well as the structural and symbolic dimensions of meals, has shaped food research since the 1970s. Often, they have been used in combination. One such example is Runar Døving’s and Maja Garnaas Kielland’s article in this issue. They examine the changing symbolic dimen-

sions of cake in Norway, relating it to the cake's ingredients, the social obligations involved in making and eating cake and the changing traditions on when and how to consume cake. Døving has in a previous work (2003) argued that food should be seen as a "total social phenomenon." Building on Marcel Mauss' (1954) classic study of the gift as a total social phenomenon (where food gifts had an important position), he argues that food has an ability to activate, in principle, all institutions within a society at the same time, which leads to both economic, moral, legal, political and religious implications (Døving 2003: 355). It means that food can be used as a way to study and gain new perspectives on societal changes.

What Is so Special about Food?

Ethnological research themes such as diffusion, cultural boundaries, controversies of taste, folk culture versus fine culture, authenticity, and narratives may (and have) been illuminated through case studies of food. Food is obviously a good entry point for studying cultural processes. But is there anything that makes food special, distinguishing food from other study objects?

Working with food for several years, at least two things stand out as special in relation to other research fields. First, it is food's rare capacity to activate all senses. While many objects of study can be touched, heard, and certainly seen, few can be smelled and tasted, too. As a regular guest lecturer at a bachelor program in culinary arts and meal sciences, I usually ask the students why they have devoted their lives to food. The most fascinating answer came from a student who grew up in Zimbabwe. At the age of five, a soldier came to his house. His initial fear vanished when it turned out that the soldier had simply forgotten his keys at the nearby restaurant and could not enter it, since it was closed during the day. The young boy was able to enter the restaurant from a small open window and, while entering, was struck by the smell. Reflecting upon why he years later became a chef, it was "the smell of restaurant" that he could point to as the main reason for his career choice. This example articulates the sense of smell as very much related to memories, in that we remem-

ber by smelling. And indeed, David Sutton has argued for a "Proustian" anthropology, highlighting how remembrances of repasts are associated with the consumption of food and drink (Sutton 2001). Although food's ability to stimulate all of the senses has evoked much academic interest in recent years (e.g. Classen, Howes & Synnott 1994; Sutton 2001; Howes 2005; Drobnick 2006), the relationships between culture and multisensory experiences is certainly a field where many interesting case studies have yet to be conducted.

A second area where the study of food offers a special angle is food's relation to the body. Food is simultaneously more ephemeral and more stable than most items of consumption. We consume food and when the knife and fork are put on the plate for the last time, the food is gone (Mintz 1993: 262). But at the same time it remains influential since it has become a part of the eaters. We open up our bodies and let a piece of the surrounding world inside ourselves. The moment of eating is one of the rare moments when our body is open (Falk 1994). Since food is potentially poisonous, we are vulnerable when we eat, and the limit between the individual body, the self, and the surrounding world is blurred (Lupton 1996; Counihan 1999). It makes the meal an event in which it is possible to be transformed into a different person or be contaminated with harmful substances. The meal is hence a repetitive rite de passage, where the person that comes out of the meal is not exactly the same as the one that entered it. Eating and drinking are embodiments of culture. And since what is embodied tends to be a bit more difficult to change than other experiences (or at least takes more time), there are insights to be gained on cultural change through the study of food and meals.

To sum up, food is central for the understanding of individuals as well as for their role in communities. It is of cultural importance both as a substance and during the social event of eating it. Food affects us at all levels, at the same time, rendering food both rewarding and difficult to grasp ethnologically. This special issue serves a number of articles that try to capture different aspects of what can be called late modern foodways, aiming to use food to bring in

new angles to the study of the relationship of global and local, and the intertwinement of culture, economy, taste, and cultural capital.

Food and Modernity

An important background for all of the articles is found in the discussion of modernity and its supposed followers late, post, or second modernity. As one of many influential theorists on modernity, Jean Baudrillard outlined two distinctive features of postmodern consumptions that may be helpful in grasping contemporary foodways: “firstly the nostalgia for origins, and secondly the obsession with authenticity” (1996: 76). To Baudrillard, the obsession with authenticity is reflected within the obsession with certainty – specifically, certainty as to the origins, date, author, and signature of a work (ibid.). The words of Baudrillard perfectly describe the street food stand described in the beginning of the introduction. The concept was filled with nostalgia for both historical origin (old-fashioned) and biologi-

cal origin (organic), which were two of the key selling points. The sausage was sold as authentic, being handmade, based on family traditions, and sold by a small-scale business with a personal touch. Though the street food stand is certainly not unique, the demand for authentic food with clear origins has had tremendous effects on the food industry, especially for the premium segments.³

Going to restaurants is an activity that has become more common and has gained cultural significance in many countries during the last decades. Anthropologists David Beriss and David Sutton (2007) have called restaurants “ideal post modern institutions” (see also Beardsworth & Bryman 1999; Larsen 2011). Restaurants are heavily involved in the production of symbols of regional, national, and ethnic belonging, and chefs as new media celebrities are factors that support their conclusion. The dissolution of the boundaries between public and private, so anxiously guarded during modernity, is yet another factor in the postmodern restaurants. Home



Ill. 1: The farmers market: in search for authenticity. (Photo: Charlotta Lindqvist)

restaurants and supper clubs are hybrids dismantling the divide (Vösu & Kannike 2011). The dissolution of boundaries can be seen in the establishment, the food itself, and in the cooking practices. Food served in restaurants used to be quite different from food served at home, a phenomenon that was guarded both by the restaurants and the home cooks. But now one may be served basically the same food at a dinner party as at a fine dining restaurant. This development has affected the restaurant business. Images of particular places have become important for defining what should be seen as a good restaurant, and a tone of familiarity has entered the previously formal public space of restaurants.

By bringing food to the core of the analysis of postmodernity, a level of concretization of this general phenomenon, discussed in so many academic works for decades, may be achieved. Some foods appear to fit better in one historic epoch than in others. Milk as a substance was a perfect tool for learning how to become modern in Northern Europe and North America.⁴ The healthy vitamins, the pasteurization program, and later on the schools' milk programs and square cartons of standardized and homogenized milk, made milk into a materialized version of the modern values of the healthy body, the appreciation of science and technology, and rational consumption. Milk has lost some of its significance in later years, being challenged by new ways of eating as well as new discourses on body and health (Jönsson 2005). But other foodstuffs are of similar importance for learning how to cope with late modern assumptions concerning health and the body.

In this issue, Ester Bardone traces the significance of berries in Estonia since the early twentieth century. Among the rural population, it was considered as poor man's food, associated with times of scarcity (although higher up in the food hierarchy than other wild food). The urban intelligentsia on the other hand praised berries for reasons of health and good housekeeping. Berries hence became a tool in the effort to define health and nature. Toward the end of the twentieth century, berries turned into a source of nostalgia. Picking berries became a tool for remembrance. Finally, the previous conflicting views

on berries seem to have been abandoned for a positive appraisal from all members of society. Berries are praised for their health benefits, taste qualities, and even the act of picking them is considered to be rewarding and fulfilling. Everyone, from chefs to school teachers, from urban hipsters to rural kennel owners, seems to find value in berries. Berries may grant the same status as nature's perfect food as milk once had, since they manage to combine the domains of health and hedonistic experience which for many years were seen as incompatible in the realm of food. Since the 1960s, Western populations have been stuck in the so-called "negative nutrition paradigm" (Levenstein 1993). We have been taught that anything tasty is most probably best avoided if we want to stay fit and healthy. But we are witnessing more and more examples of how this paradigm is being challenged in daily life, and the story of berries in Estonia is a good empirical example of changing foodscapes.

The Global Quest for Localness

The most prominent dissolution of boundaries in late modern food may be the intermingling of local and global within the glocalisation process (Robertson 1995). To put the global and local in juxtaposition is seldom in line with the actual practices in everyday life. When Jón Þór Pétursson follows organic apples from Chile to Iceland, it is striking how the same search for authenticity in food can be found among the consumers that follow the Chilean apple farmer Eduardo's blog from the other part of the globe, as among the consumers that go for local cheese or berries, to mention other examples from the articles in this issue. New technologies have added an extra dimension to the importance of place by offering both advanced systems of traceability in the global food systems and personalized visual representations of place, such as when small local producers are presented to a global audience with names, pictures, and narratives of both the food and the manufacturers as individuals. The attempts to make food more personalized with new media may be interpreted as a way of obscuring the political and economic processes behind food production. Jón Þór



Ill. 2: Local food in supermarket. The taste of Skåne (the most southern region in Sweden) being promoted by local retailers. (Photo: Jannie Vestergaard)

Pétursson tells the story of how Icelandic consumers engage themselves with organic apples from Chile, and asks whether this is not a striking example of commodity fetishism as described by Karl Marx. But he also brings up the issue of contemporary food consumption as a way of identity building. Eating Eduardo's apples is not just a matter of vitamins or the sensory experience of chewing on a juicy apple; it is also a matter of trying to construct a way of living that makes sense – a life that is sustainable, healthy, responsible and joyful.

As with the global and the local, processes of homogenization and heterogeneity are simultaneous when it comes to food. From multinational food producers to fast food restaurants to French style fine dining restaurants, many actors within the food business have been involved in processes to-

ward global homogeneity. People from Vancouver to Auckland, from Santiago to Helsinki can heat the same ready-made meals in their microwave ovens, and go to burger restaurants or fancy eating establishments serving molecular gastronomy and organic wines in a remarkably similar way. But we have also witnessed a process towards an increased appreciation of the local. No trend is probably more global than the craze for localness.

The recent interest in localness, authenticity, and heritage in the food area should not, however, obscure the fact that food was, and still is, one of the more prominent areas of globalization. It was food such as spices, sugar (Mintz 1986), salt, and cod (Kurlansky 1997, 2002) that created global markets, but also an interest and an urge for the exotic among consumers. Food has probably been the most impor-

tant tool for dealing with the increasingly multicultural postwar Europe. A combination of improved logistics, migration, and leisure travel has fundamentally changed the way of eating. This may be especially prominent in Scandinavia. As Døving and Garnaas Kielland show, multiculturalism in food has for decades been seen as something positive among middle-class Norwegians, but clashes between traditional food and meals and the new diverse foodscape sometimes happen in unexpected ways. The traditional way of eating cake in Norway looks like a perfect tool for integrating one of the most prominent immigrant groups, Muslims from the Middle East. Apart from having some resemblances in cake traditions, the traditional Norwegian cakes are generally considered halal. But baking and eating cakes in a traditional way is problematic, since it has become associated with traditional gender roles and unhealthy eating habits due to the high content of sugar and fat in many cakes. While having cakes, middle-class Norwegians are nowadays stuck in the midst of conflicting norms where the ideals of being healthy, equal, and multicultural clash.

Many actors have taken interest in local food, and the diversity is striking. Urban activist groups, rural district associations, nationalist politicians, global food companies, chefs, and foodies all praise local food. It is a simultaneously bottom-up and top-down process (Tellström 2006). One of the most obvious examples of this development is the European Union's system of granting certain food products the status of protected designation of origin. This phenomenon is dealt with in two of the articles in this issue. Fabio Mattioli analyzes the political processes behind the system, while Sarah May follows two varieties of cheese in Germany in order to give an ethnographic account of how contemporary food is involved in the "commercialization of the commons." Here, a supposedly common or shared food production practice of a region is turned into a label or designation that can give a few (and sometimes a single) food company competitive advantages on an international market. Such regional or geographic indications are at least in Europe an increasing form of proprietying culture (Bendix & Hafstein 2009).

The Cultural Economy of Food

Food is one of the fields where ethnological knowledge has become directly connected to commercial value. The increasing intertwining of "culture" and "economy" is a focal point in both cultural studies and economics during recent years (DuGay & Pryke 2004; Lash & Urry 1994; Löfgren & Willim 2005). The framework of a "New Economy" based on cultural values with labels such as Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore 1999) or Dream Society (Jensen 2001) has been launched. It might not be a coincidence that the mentioned best-sellers on the new economy built their arguments on food. Pine and Gilmore took the different prizes of a cup of coffee from raw produce in Colombia to a fancy café in Venice to build up their argument on how economic value is built on neither commodities, nor products or services, but on experiences (1999), while Jensen took the value of an organic egg as the ultimate sign of the Dream Society (2001). Food's economic value is certainly changing, and the changes within the supposedly traditional food industry are as prominent as in media and biotech businesses. The return of "traditional" food, the theme of the conference where most of the articles in this issue were first presented, is a striking example of how commercialization processes use terms and knowledge from cultural sciences, which, as many of the authors have experienced, leads to both dialog and conflicts between business and academia.

Lash and Urry (2002), and DuGay and Pryke (2004), building on Baudrillard, define the contemporary economy as an "economy of signs." The use of symbolic cultural messages is a key element in the New Economy, as it involves the responsibility for consumers to develop skills in "reading" cultural values. In regards to food products, culture as value is closely related to the commercial value of authenticity. Authenticity has been described as a product of shared systems of signification (Ashley et al. 2004: 7). What constitutes the "authentic" certainly changes over time and is subject to constant negotiations (Peterson 1997). The economic value of authenticity is much easier to define than which foods can be considered authentic. If we look into

the commercial domains of trend spotting, we can see statements such as:

Key trends to impact the food and beverage market through 2012 and beyond... relate to purity, authenticity and sustainability, as consumers continue to look for products with added value. (Innova Market Insights 2011)

Added value still matters. Despite lingering economic uncertainty and mounting scrutiny of product health claims, consumers remain willing to spend a bit more on food that does, or stands for, 'something'. (Euromonitor 2010)

In retrospect, it is striking how much of the food industry's so-called value-added products can be traced back to a critique of the very same industry. Warren Belasco stresses the importance of the countercultural critique toward the food industry that began to emerge in 1966. Some of the more important elements were avoiding processed "plastic" food by trying new ways to make food more fun – for example through the delight of improvisation, craftsmanship, ethnic and regional cooking, and the organic paradigm (Belasco 1989: 4). While the countercuisine was initially interpreted as a threat by the major food companies, the ideas soon became the main inspiration source for product development. The wide range of rural, authentic, handmade, old-fashioned, ethnic, and light products launched over recent decades owe much to the counterculture of the 1960s (Jönsson, Dare & Knutsson 2013).

Even though the quest for small-scale local food is essentially an urban phenomenon, it has certainly had effects on the countryside. Sarah May brings us a story about how the regions of Allgäu and Odenwald are involved in a European political economy of local and traditional food, where the claims of authenticity have received legislative support. Fabio Mattioli has an Italian perspective on the same process, bringing up critical issues of what can be lost and gained in these processes of turning habits into traditions and finally, into local specialties on a wider market.

Culinary Capital

Questions of class and cultural capital have been prominent in food studies for a long time. As Carole Counihan aptly puts it: "One's place in the social system is revealed by what, how much, and with whom one eats" (Counihan 1999: 8). When food systems change, social systems are likely to change as well. When food is abundant, new modes of distinctions are needed to mark boundaries between different eating communities. Norbert Elias (1994) showed, in his classical study of the civilization process, how changing manners of eating can be traced to a dynamic process of competition between different groups. Similar thoughts can be seen in Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) writings on distinctions, in how the urban bourgeoisie puts up and guards norms on what should be considered as good taste, not to say the least in the domain of gastronomy (see also Mennell 2005).

Though neither Elias nor Bourdieu put much attention to aspects of gender in these processes, studying the creation of food is always a way of studying the creation of gender (Lupton 1996; Counihan 1999). Preparation of food has been an inseparable part of the creation of both female (housewives) and male (chefs) identities. Reading blogs about making sourdough bread or sausages (an almost exclusively male activity in the blogosphere) is also a way of reading about men trying to set a male scene in the female domain of cooking by highlighting the recreational and pleasurable aspects of cooking and eating. Sociologist Stephen Mennell (1996) who has studied the establishment of gastronomy as a cultural field, has shown, as early as the nineteenth century, a deliberate mission from the male gastronomes to actively try to define "the art and science of delicate eating" (ibid.: 266), thereby trying to teach others about good taste.

But there is certainly not one single definition of good taste. What is embraced by foodies can be considered as both unintelligible and unattractive for others. Fine dining restaurants with small helpings, strange names on dishes and wines and snooty waiters are ridiculed, and burgers and fries are praised as proper and tasty food by people outside the domi-

nant gastronomic community. New media, such as food blogs on the Internet, have created new playgrounds (or battlefields) where the power to define good taste is constantly at stake.

Even though the struggle to define good taste has been carried out for centuries (see Mennell 1996), it seems as if the urge to require “culinary cultural capital” (Bell 2000: 1) is more prominent than ever. For males in the hipster generation, the knowledge about baking sourdough bread and making sausages is as important for their social status as club memberships and professional titles were for their fathers. Returning to the initial discussions on food and modernity, we may see how the normative aspects of cooking have changed. While modernity focused on time saving, rationalization, and public life, and we learnt to cook fast and convenient, late modernity focused on emotions, experiences, and self-realization, and we learnt to cook as a lifestyle project, focusing on taste and enjoyment. Reality, however, is not as simple as the different discourses might imply. The different rationalities live side by side and create tensions in our relation to meals and cooking at home (Kaufmann 2010).

The longing for good, local, tasty food, as well as the increasing interest to cook excellent meals on an everyday basis, may be presented by the practitioners as a way of simply adding quality of life. But apart from the fact that cooking still involves a lot of work and involves time-consuming, repetitive work that many believe is simply boring, there is always a power dimension in meals and cooking (Short 2006). Richard Wilk points out that imbalance of power, whether based on age, gender, or ethnicity, is brought to the table during family meals. Meals are events where authority is demonstrated and roles are enforced (Wilk 2010: 429). This is a theme in Døving’s and Kielland’s article on the cake eating ritual, where different norms and hierarchies are imposed and negotiated in a changing social environment.

There is certainly room for many more studies of the dinner table context in European ethnology. Surprisingly few have used ethnographic studies of meal situations in order to unwrap power practices

in everyday life. Although wide in scope, this issue is primarily dealing with luxury food themes. But not everyone is interested in eating authentic and traditional food, and many more do not have the economic or cultural capital to do so. The renewed interest from companies and authorities in the ethnological research field of traditional food brings new possibilities both for funding and for reaching a wider audience for active scholars in the field. But it should not prevent us from having a critical look at the phenomenon or to study other sorts of food and meal contexts. There are certainly interesting cultural phenomena to unwrap from the study of fine dining restaurants, fast food establishments, meat packing industries, and industrial agriculture complexes to mention but a few of relevant places for ethnographic studies that are not covered here.

I hope that the articles in this issue can be inspiring for such studies, as well as other studies dealing with food, both as substance and as an entry point for analyzing cultural processes of place, tradition, economy, authenticity, and more.

Notes

- 1 The support from Sigfrid Svensson’s foundation is gratefully acknowledged.
- 2 See discussions in the introductions in Lupton (1996), Counihan (1999), Mintz (1993), Korsmeyer (2005), Belasco (2008).
- 3 The concept of late modernity as a factor in contemporary food production and consumption has been advanced by, among others, Warde (1998), Tovey & Blanc (2002), and Kniazeva & Venkatesh (2007).
- 4 See DuPuis (2002), Lyngø (2001), Jönsson (2013).

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