

Regimes of Taste and Somaesthetics¹

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Abstract: *The aim of the article is to point out the social and cultural conditions of culinary practices in light of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics. Tastes reflect our social position and cultural background. We are what we eat, but what we eat is not exactly a matter of choice. We are ruled by various regimes of taste, and our bodies are formed in compliance with culturally entrenched norms and values. Drawing on theories from Bourdieu and Shusterman, this article explores the ways in which taste disciplines our bodies and examines possibilities of emancipation. Two feature films: *Babette's Feast* and *Blue is the Warmest Colour* are used as an art component, which helps to highlight the discussed problems.*

Keywords: *somaesthetics, habitus, food, taste, film*

Eating, in fact, serves not only to maintain the biological machinery of the body, but to make concrete one of the specific modes of relation between a person and the world...²

Luce Giard

In Western culture, the social structure consists basically of classes, strata, and occupational groups. Social divisions overlap with economic differences, which Karl Marx was intent on highlighting, yet this major criterion intersects with other important factors, such as education and social capital in the broad sense of the term. The analysis of interplay and mutual grounding of these forces was an important addition Pierre Bourdieu made to the Marxian account, contributing seminal to our understanding of how social divisions are shaped and perpetuated. Bourdieu's brilliant analysis is developed in his famous *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Inquiring into what differentiates members of particular social groups, the French sociologist concludes that it is taste first of all, rather than economic capital. Taste denotes for Bourdieu both culinary preferences and aesthetic choices that determine our ways of interacting with the world.

To label the ensemble of predispositions which socialization processes encode in our bodies Bourdieu uses the term *habitus*: "The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of these practices."³ The space spanning between these two capacities of the habitus can accommodate a variety of lifestyles. The habitus is a form of embodied disposition, which is often unconscious and revealed,

¹ Preparing this text was supported by NCN grant: *Aesthetic value of food. Pragmatist Perspective*, No. 2013/11 / B / HS1 / 04176.

² Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life, vol. 2. Living and Cooking*, trans. Timothy J. Tomasik, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 183.

³ Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 170.

as Bourdieu writes, “only in bodily hexis, diction, bearing, manners.”⁴ The habitus tends to be described as an embodied necessity and a differentiating system that generates various practices and, at the same time, schemes for evaluating them. The habitus is a “structuring structure,” but it is also subject to “structuring” itself. It emerges from particular social and economic conditions.

Drawing on Immanuel Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment*, Bourdieu reminds that the Kantian aesthetics, preoccupied with setting apart that which pleases from that which gratifies, was supposed to result in capturing the distinctiveness of the aesthetic judgment as pure disinterestedness in contrast to “the interest of reason which defines Good.”⁵ The French sociologist observes that only the members of the privileged classes can possibly afford this “pure” aesthetics while “working-class people expect every image to explicitly perform a function, if only that of a sign, and their judgments make reference, often explicitly, to the norms of morality or agreeableness. Whether rejecting or praising, their appreciation always has an ethical basis.”⁶ This difference becomes particularly pronounced when we analyze the aesthetic categories guiding everyday choices and decisions, such as what to wear, where to live, and what to eat. “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.”⁷

Bourdieu disagrees with Kant on one more point. He argues convincingly that our aesthetic choices are closely intertwined with our culinary preferences. There is a close affinity between artistic preferences and gastronomic taste. Examining the choices made by people from various backgrounds, Bourdieu points out that “[t]he antithesis between quantity and quality, substance and form, corresponds to the opposition – linked to different distances from necessity – between the taste of necessity, which favors the most ‘filling’ and most economical foods, and the taste of liberty – or luxury – which shifts the emphasis to the manner (of presenting, serving, eating etc.) and tends to use stylized forms to deny function.”⁸ Moreover, since culture highly appreciates such qualities as disinterestedness, refinement, exceptionality and sublimation, “art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences.”⁹

The forms of behavior instilled in training become a second nature, one so transparent that social actors take it for granted and hardly conceptualize at all. “The sense of limits implies forgetting the limits.”¹⁰ Paradoxical though it may sound, forgetting the limits is the surest preventive means against transgressing them. It is so because, as Bourdieu explains, “... primary experience of the social world is that of *doxa*, an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident.”¹¹ *Doxa* is a framework which contains action and sets limits to social mobility. As Bourdieu emphasizes, “objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a ‘sense of one’s place’ which leads one

4 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 424

5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1984, 5.

6 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 5.

7 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 6.

8 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 6.

9 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 7.

10 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 471.

11 Bourdieu, *Distinction...* p. 471.

to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded.”¹²

Weaving a grid of values, patterns of understanding and ways of action, the habitus organizes the style of engaging in social activity, modes of perception, and frameworks of assessment characteristic of particular individuals and social groups. What is the differentiating effect of the habitus on culinary choices? There are groups of products that are typically opted for by the urban and rural populations, respectively; there are also products that tend to be chosen by particular genders or age groups. The diet of peasantry features opulent servings of starches, pork, potatoes, and poultry. The bourgeois menus prioritize veal, lamb, mutton, fish, and seafood. Women tend to drink more milk and consume more sweet foods, at least in the peasant and working classes, with the rule being largely obliterated among senior managerial staff and liberal professions.

The Confessions of St. Augustine make it clear that the saint found it a lesser challenge to renounce sexual temptations than to withstand the enticements leading to the sin of gluttony.¹³ The attractions of the dinner table prove far more perilous than the allures of the body since we all must eat, but not everybody indulges in physical love.¹⁴ Out of the two obvious things shared by humans and sustaining human life – that is, eating and sex – eating is far more common. However, the activity, which is common to all people, is, at the same time, a strongly differentiating one. Social characterization through culinary choices is perfectly exemplified in two short dinner scenes in *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (*La vie d'Adèle*). Set in the homes of two main characters – eponymous Adèle, a high school student, and Emma, a spirited student of arts – the episodes pithily portray their differences in age, life experience and, emphatically, class background. In full accord with Bourdieu's theories, the fare served at Adèle's working-class home is simple, cheap and hearty, while Emma's educated parents treat their guest to expensive and not really nourishing oysters, the food Adèle has never tasted before. The oysters symbolize refinement, prosperity and sexually-laden sensuality. They are counted among the most famous aphrodisiacs and associated with the vagina. It has never occurred to Adèle's parents that Emma might be something more than an obliging friend that helps their daughter in learning. Passionate erotic scenes in Adèle's "maiden" room are not imaginable within the bounds of her parents' perception, so they regard Adèle's girlfriend as just a friend who simply stays overnight. Connoisseurs of refined cuisine, Emma's parents are socially and culturally educated, and supportive of their daughter's choices. Differences in culinary tastes instantaneously reveal differences of class and culture, which will ultimately contribute to the relationship falling apart in spite of considerable erotic fascination and emotional engagement.

The habitus forms habits, modes of thinking and perception, and moral convictions. It is a mold which imposes severe constraints and is extremely difficult, if not entirely impossible, to shake off: "It functions as a social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position."¹⁵ The inflow of money does not furnish a *nouveau riche* with a skill of spending it freely, an apparently inborn capacity of owners or heirs to old fortunes. A new-rich may afford sophisticated foods, but he still enjoys pork chops best and regards pancakes and jam as the fare suitable for women's palates.¹⁶ As Bourdieu

12 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 471.

13 See St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, London: Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 235-7.

14 Cf. Sander L. Gilman, *Diets and Dieting: a Cultural Encyclopedia*, New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 61.

15 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*p. 466.

16 Cf. Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, pp. 373-374.

explains, this is so because “the schemes of habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will.”¹⁷

What will happen if a refined culinary taste collides with a Puritan taste? Does an attempt to change the entrenched tastes and tradition stand any chance of success?

Babette’s Feast

Alice B. Toklas, a Paris-based American, Gertrude Stein’s long-time partner, and, crucially, an excellent cook, had no doubt that the French had developed an outstanding culture of gastronomy, and that cooking could be considered art. She believed that exceptional dishes triggered emotions comparable to those evoked by artworks. In her cook book, she admitted to a telling dilemma: “What more can one say? If one had the choice of again hearing Pachmann play the two Chopin sonatas or dining once more at the Café Anglaise, which would one choose?”¹⁸ Cooking herself for the Parisian artistic elite, she used her dishes many a time as a tool of emotional hierarchization and emotional communication. Sometimes, the emotional gesture was not reciprocated. This is what, famously, happened when Alice served fish with the idea to celebrate Picasso. She cooked a sea bass, decorated it with tomato puree-colored mayonnaise, and embellished it further with a pattern of hard-boiled eggs, black truffles and herbs. Proud of her work, the cook did not expect to have her tribute rejected by the artist, who actually suspected the color configuration of garnish to allude to his rival Matisse.¹⁹ Picasso was Stein’s close friend. Matisse was also one of regular guests to her house, but was definitely less liked. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* features a story about a very competent “maid of all work,” Héléne, who had very distinct opinions on a variety of issues, claiming for example that “a Frenchman should not stay unexpectedly to a meal particularly if he asked the servant beforehand what there was for dinner. (...) So when Miss Stein said to her, Monsieur Matisse is staying for dinner this evening, she would say, in that case I will not make an omelette but fry the eggs. It takes the same number of eggs and the same amount of butter but it shows less respect, and he will understand.”²⁰ The author of the autobiography recounts further that Héléne “was terribly interested in seeing Monsieur Picasso and his wife and child and cooked her very best dinner for him (...)”²¹

The Café Anglaise, mentioned by Toklas and generally enjoying the reputation of the best restaurant in 19th-century Paris, is where the eponymous heroine of *Babette’s Feast* is revealed to have worked. Babette’s history is told in one of Karen Blixen’s short stories and in its screen adaptation,²² which transfers the narrative of “Babette’s Feast” from the original location in 19th-century Norway to a remote village on the coast of Jutland, home to two beautiful sisters – Martine and Philippa. Their father, the leader of a strict Lutheran community, spared no effort to make the girls entirely committed to himself and the religious group. Named in honor of Martin Luther and his friend Philipp Melanchton and brought up in strict evangelical discipline,

17 Bourdieu, *Distinction...*, p. 466.

18 Alice B. Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book. With a Foreword by M. F. K. Fisher*, New York et al.: Harper Perennial, 2010, p. 98.

19 Toklas, *Cook Book...*, p. 28.

20 Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the web edition published by eBooks@Adelaide. Retrieved 3.07.2015.

21 *Ibid.*

22 1987, dir. Gabriel Axel.

the sisters relinquished the chances of love and worldly life offered at a certain moment in their lives by two men. Martine did not requite the advances of Lorens Löewenhielm, a young officer “exiled” to live with his aunt as a punishment for his dissipated lifestyle. Philippa, in turn, refused the offer made by Achille Papin, a famous opera singer who, enchanted with her voice, promised her triumphs on the stages of Paris. After their father’s death, the sisters keep up his work. But with its charismatic leader gone, the community descends into aggravating antagonisms and, as the years go by, its members grow ever more embittered, and mutual resentments exacerbate.

On a rainy evening in 1871, an exhausted woman knocks on the sisters’ door, and presents a letter of reference penned by Papin. She is Babette Hersant, a refugee from France, where the civil war is raging. With her family brutally killed and herself narrowly surviving, Babette is grateful to offer her housekeeping services in exchange for a safe place to stay. She conforms to the principles of the village, and tunes into its rhythm of life. She learns how to cook bread soup and dried fish dishes, the local staple fare. As she is very reticent about herself, little do the sisters realize that for all these years they have had the most famous Parisian chef for a servant. The years go by with hardly any variation until the day when Babette receives a letter informing that she has won the lottery of 15,000 francs, an exorbitant sum. Upon this event, she persuades Martine and Philippa to let her prepare a real French dinner to celebrate their late father’s hundredth birthday. With the planned dinner courses including turtle soup, quail with *foie gras* stuffing and truffles, and *blini* with caviar, Babette has all the ingredients of her opulent and refined dishes brought over from France together with beautiful tablecloths, candlesticks, and China crockery. The stream of supplies keeps flowing in as each course is to be served with the best wine vintages and champagne, and the dessert features rum sponge cake with candied fruit. Witnessing their pantry fill with cages of fowl, crates of beverages, and other odd produce barred from their diet so far, the sisters begin to regret their decision and feel anxious about how their conservative fellow-believers will react. Martine has a dream in which a huge turtle is consumed by flames. The terrified sisters, for whom eating has routinely had only a life-sustaining function, with food for the soul given an absolute preference, call a meeting, in which the congregation decide to give the dinner a go, but deliberately to ignore its sensory thrills and pass in silence over the food served. A congregation member concludes: “It will be as if we never had the sense of taste.” Comforted a little by this resolution, the sisters stop worrying so much about what Babette is up to. The last question concerns the bottle put on the table. Martine asks: “Surely that isn’t wine?” “No,” replies Babette, “it’s Clos de Vougeot.”

The ostensibly simple story-line of *Babette’s Feast* telling about two sisters – inhabitants of a remote village – stages, in fact, a highly complex world of symbolic relationships lending themselves to diverse interpretations, and conveys a richly polyvalent message. The eponymous feast has been analyzed in terms of ethics and politics (Alain Finkielkraut), in religious (Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, Dariusz Czaja, and Priscilla Parhust Ferguson) and aesthetic perspectives (Wiesław Juszczak), and in the psychoanalytic framework (Sharn Waldron). This catalogue of approaches implies what complexity nutrition accrues when it is incorporated into the order of culture.

In the light of Bourdieu’s categories, the story can be construed as an unexpected clash between and an intervention of one habitus into another one. On the one hand, there is the Protestant ethos, which, as French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut contends, never appreciated cooking: “Nutrition was necessary, but a *necessity* must under no circumstances be elevated into *an art*.”²³ On the other hand, there is an entirely different attitude to food. For Babette, as well

23 Alain Finkielkraut, *Serce rozumiejące (Un coeur intelligent)* [The Understanding Heart], trans. Jan Maria Kłoczowski, WUW, p. 164.

as for the whole social class she served in France, food was not reducible to meeting the basic needs. It patently connoted prestige and pleasure. Satisfying the expectations of the bourgeoisie was an art of the highest order. In Bourdieu's terms, the film suggests that the Protestant *doxa* yields to the enchantment of art: "A second article of faith in *Babette's Feast* is the certainty of the instantaneous and direct power of art. (...) art touches individuals of every station, even against their will."²⁴

The members of the religious community come to realize their limitations. Partaking of the feast is a transformative, albeit admittedly fleeting, experience to them. As Bourdieu teaches us, the situation verges on improbability. There has actually been no time enough to learn new – odd and intense – flavours. In attempting to defend the film's message, we could cite the argument advanced by Ferguson, who observes that "two performing arts, music and cuisine, speak to the senses directly; their effect is all in the moment. Critical appreciation enhances the experience by increasing understanding, but the senses make the primal connection."²⁵ This suggests that gustatory pleasure can be felt even if one does not realize that what one tastes is famous champagne rather than lemonade. This is, incidentally, what one of the guests at the dinner mistakenly believes. Granted, *Babette's Feast* is not a socio-psychological account of reality, but even so it can effectively serve as a starting point for reflection on the possibilities of transforming taste. It is a perfect starting point for at least two reasons. Firstly, it deals with French cuisine, which boasts the status of the world's best, and is, as such, a unique benchmark and frame of reference for culinary tastes. This reputation has certainly been aided by the fact that, as Toklas observes, "the French approach to food is characteristic; they bring to their consideration of the table the same appreciation, respect, intelligence and lively interest that they have for the other arts, for painting, for literature and for the theatre."²⁶

Secondly, 19th-century France went through a social makeover propelled by the French Revolution, and, at the same time, through a culinary transformation triggered by the emergence of a new institution – the restaurant. The best cooks, who had worked for the aristocracy before, turned chefs cooking for a new, robustly developing social stratum – the bourgeoisie. These factors facilitated and channeled a metamorphosis of the culinary tradition. Bourdieu convincingly shows that financial and social advancement entails also educational challenges. Acquisition of new tastes and learning to spend new money are painstaking and exigent processes. Contrary to his idea of how such transformations come to pass, they require both determination and competent teachers. The birth of restaurants precipitated the rise of culinary literature. Professional restaurant critics appeared side by side with literary critics and took upon themselves the task of "serving, modifying and mediating consumption."²⁷

In the age of post-revolution transformations, the role of the guide through the world of new possibilities and new challenges fell upon Alexandre Balthazar Laurent Grimod de La Reynière. His *Almanach des gourmands* (*The Almanac of Gourmands*) was the first guidebook through tastes. The groundbreaking and voluminous work, published annually from 1803 to 1812 (except 1809 and 1811),²⁸ proved a bookselling blockbuster and a model to be emulated by

²⁴ Priscilla Parhust Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 193.

²⁵ Ferguson, *Accounting...*, p. 194.

²⁶ Toklas, *Cook Book...*, p. 1.

²⁷ Robert Appelbaum, *Dishing It Out: In Search of the Restaurant Experience*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2011, p. 47.

²⁸ See Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996, p. 267.

numerous imitators.²⁹ Its popularity soared as many craved to know where the best seafood was on sale in Paris, how to carve mutton properly, what the proper table manners were, and how a banquet menu should be put together. Grimod noticed that changes in customs and habits had led to an increased appreciation of bodily – “purely animal,” as he calls them – pleasures. He wrote:

The hearts of most wealthy Parisians suddenly metamorphosed into gizzards. The sentiments are no longer anything but sensations, and their desires no longer anything but appetites. It is for that reason that one conveniently renders them a service by giving them, in several pages, the means of accomplishing, within the domain of good (*La bonne chère*), the best match possible between their inclinations and their money.³⁰

Grimod did not keep his observations to himself only; nor did he combat “the new.” Instead, he created a kind of guidebook for gourmets in which criticism blends with humor, and scornful commentaries on the new class of owners are interspersed with precious advice on how to handle the challenges mounting for all those who venture onto the path of food connoisseurship. His reasonable decision was to make money on the transformation of the previous-age man of sentiment into the 19th-century consumer, and to profit from enlightening him and making him happy.³¹

Somaesthetics

If we seek to re-draw the habitus, the article “Somatic Awakening and the Art of Living” is, certainly, a useful source to consult. It describes Richard Shusterman’s own experience of a stay at a Zen monastery, and relates in detail the rituals of meals with all the involved difficulties, such as mastering the art of eating with chopsticks. What the article offers is an account of successful training, which aimed at discarding the somatic style of the Western professor for the sake of conduct and manners proper to the Buddhist monks.³²

A monastic stint and demanding somatic training are no surprising choices in Shusterman, who has long been dedicated to making the ideal of unified theory and practice a reality. It is, actually, one of the pillars his somaesthetics project rests on. At this point, we should rehearse the project’s major tenets. William James said that pragmatism was “a new name for some old ways of thinking.” Shusterman thinks similarly about somaesthetics, and claims that in founding a new philosophical discipline, he in fact revisits the primary assumptions of philosophy.³³ Somaesthetics aims to comprehensively focus on the body,³⁴ which corresponds to the Ancient ideas of practicing philosophy as an embodied art of living.³⁵ So we go back to basics under the new banner of “somaesthetics,” which is a conscious move as, according to the author of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, a new name “can have a special efficacy for reorganizing and

29 Grimod’s most famous follower was Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin.

30 A. B. L. Grimond de la Reynière qtd. in Appelbaum, *Dishing...*, p. 45.

31 Cf. Appelbaum, *Dishing...*

32 See Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetic Awakening and the Art of Living: Everyday Aesthetics in American Transcendentalism and Japanese Zen Practice,” in Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

33 See Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed., New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, p. 263.

34 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics...*, p. 262.

35 See Shusterman, *Thinking...*, p. 290, and “Introduction” to R. Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

thus reanimating old insights.”³⁶ Shusterman defines somaesthetics as “the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning.”³⁷ The first two parts of this definition is crucial to this article. Shusterman’s project presupposes accumulating knowledge and discourses on and of bodiliness, but it has also a normative dimension that pertains to methods of optimizing human somatic functioning. Knowledge on how the body functions and consciousness of one’s own bodiliness must be intertwined with somatic practice because only through combining theory and practice can the perceptive capacities be enhanced. This is prerequisite to a better and fuller functioning both in the natural environment and in the social one. Shusterman recommends a therapy of mindfulness, knowledge of one’s own body, and reflection on how it operates so that we could make the most of what our body and our environment offer us. He also calls for a greater sensitivity to our own and other people’s needs. Expanding perceptual capacities creates opportunity of amplified being in the world and deriving pleasure even from the simplest experiences.³⁸

Summing up, we should emphasize that somaesthetics fuses three dimensions – analytical, pragmatic and practical. The analytical level concerns accumulation of knowledge. Shusterman considers traditional ontological and epistemological body-related issues, and augments them with the socio-political considerations as developed by Foucault and Bourdieu.³⁹ The pragmatic level comprises the normative and prescriptive elements of somaesthetics, and entails “proposing specific methods of somatic improvement and engaging in their comparative critique.”⁴⁰ The practical level, in turn, pertains to action – specific somatic practices which are the ultimate goal of constructing the theoretical framework.

At the core of the somaesthetics project lies the idea of conscious work and change – the idea of improvement. Somaesthetics is a democratic project addressed to everybody, irrespective of their age, sex, class and/or somatic dispositions. Of course, Shusterman is not oblivious to various limitations and dichotomies we are entangled in as members of society: “For culture gives us the languages, values, social institutions, and artistic media through which we think and act and also express ourselves aesthetically, just as it gives us the forms of diet, exercise, and somatic styling that shape not only our bodily appearance and behavior but also the ways we experiences our body...”⁴¹ As the American pragmatist stresses, all aspects of our lives are modeled by culture, but, though always subject and exposed to external forces, we have also a potential of change and, thus, of overcoming various barriers – a potential of emancipation.

Looking to Shusterman’s somaesthetics for ways of extricating ourselves from the “snares” of the habitus seems a natural step to take as Bourdieu and Shusterman come from a similar pragmatic background.⁴² In his article titled “Bourdieu and Anglo-American Philosophy,” Richard Shusterman dwells on the affinities between Bourdieu and Dewey. The two share the notion that social practices are constituted on the pre-linguistic and pre-reflective level, which, however, does not entail their complete repeatability and permanence. Social practices are

36 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics...*, p. 263.

37 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics...*, p. 267.

38 Shusterman, *Thinking ...*, p. 299.

39 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics...*, p. 271.

40 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics...*, p. 272.

41 Shusterman, *Thinking ...*, p. 27.

42 Bourdieu is sometimes called a pragmatic sociologist. In an essay titled “A (Neo) American in Paris: Bourdieu, Mead, and Pragmatism,” Mitchell discusses the influence of pragmatic philosophy, in particular of Mead and Dewey, on the French sociologist’s theoretical concepts.

responses to the changing environment, and yet they enable people to re-make this environment as their needs dictate. Admittedly, Bourdieu and Dewey employ different categories: Bourdieu's central notion is "habitus," while Dewey's – "habit." This notwithstanding, there is a striking resemblance between their concepts, which not only reassert each other's validity, but can also be mutually complementary. Pragmatism can rely on Bourdieu for "providing a more precise, sophisticated, and empirically validated system of concepts for the analysis of society's structure and its strategies and mechanisms of reproduction and change."⁴³ For example, Shusterman points out that "Bourdieu's Nietzschean strain of emphasizing the intrinsic social conflict over power and prestige provides a useful balance to Dewey's excessive faith that all conflict could somehow be reconciled in the organic social whole."⁴⁴ Bourdieu, in turn, as Shusterman argues, could benefit from espousing the concept of language that Dewey adopts. A particularly important thing is that Dewey postulates a critique of ordinary language as tending to include elements of oppression. Of course, as Shusterman writes, it is an open question in how far such a revision is possible (if at all), and, if so, whether or not it puts at risk the stability of the whole social system. Be it as it may, philosophy, together with critical social sciences, cannot give up on that task.

Shusterman repeatedly cites the writings of Bourdieu, whom he counts among important formative sources of his theory. When elucidating his concept of somaesthetics, the author of *Body Consciousness* frequently refers to the French philosopher. What the two frameworks have in common is the idea of the body as a social construct that reflects the culturally differentiated conditions in which particular individuals live. In other words, individuals' social histories are written in their bodies. However, despite indisputable affinities, their conceptions are not identical. The basic differences seem to lie in the emancipatory potential – the promise of healing inscribed in somaesthetics. Bourdieu's world is hierarchical and stiff, and his vision eschews transformation and shuffling off the regime of the habitus. It does not offer a dynamic account of culture which, in spite of its order and controlling function, finds itself in constant change. This is the objection Luce Giard advances against the author of *Distinction*, calling the book's hypotheses a dogma that brackets off the role of chance, influence of other people, or just individual ingeniousness: "Everything happens as if society, without any history other than the temporal unfolding of individual trajectories, were immobile, locked in the vise of a stratification into classes and subclasses that are clear-cut and strictly hierarchical."⁴⁵ Since dietary practices are formed in early childhood, Bourdieu believes they are particularly deeply entrenched and perpetuated. But as Giard notices, "in spite of its scope, *Distinction* remains silent on ways of doing-cooking: as is often the case with Bourdieu, feminine activities are a place of silence or disinterest that his analysis does not trouble itself to take into account."⁴⁶ Bourdieu develops his argument and draws conclusions based predominantly on the consumption styles, rather than on the culinary practices as such. Drawing on the concept of practices put forward by Michel de Certeau, Giard suggests that women's creativity eludes Bourdieu's attention even though preparation of food is usually the task of women, who in their individual cooking practices are on many occasions able to defy the constraints imposed by stiff social styles.

The idea behind somatic exercises, mentioned above, is expanding the array of sensory and aesthetic pleasures, on the one hand, and eliminating the negative habits inscribed in our bodies, on the other. As a practitioner of the Feldenkrais method, Shusterman works on the

43 Richard Shusterman, "Bourdieu and Anglo-American Philosophy," in: *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. R. Shusterman, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 21.

44 Shusterman, "Bourdieu..." p. 21.

45 Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, *The Practice...*, p. 182.

46 Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, *The Practice...*, p. 183.

bodily re-education of patients who report many problems caused by malfunctioning bodies. In his discussion of somatic pathologies bound up with inappropriate habits recorded in the body, Shusterman addresses also wrong dietary routines.⁴⁷ Building on the normative notion of “perfection of every sense” developed by David Hume, Shusterman concludes that there is no reason why training of taste buds should not be included into the scope of somatic exercises.

Culinary practices and social change

Somaesthetics shows the way we could follow to understand how changes can be made to the habitus, and, more importantly perhaps, explains how our choices, including the gastronomic ones, affect our total functioning. But let us return to *Babette's Feast*. It is by no means coincidental that there are twelve banqueters around the table. At its core, *Babette's Feast* is, namely, nothing other than a Last Supper⁴⁸ effecting a transubstantiation and healing of the community, parallel to the transformation of a meal into a work of art. Contrary to the sisters' expectations, it is not Babette's farewell dinner before her return to Paris. Just the opposite; this is a gesture in which she ultimately bids farewell to her old life and pays homage to art – its essence and core. It is the last opportunity that Babette seizes to showcase her perfection in the culinary art, and, which is a striving common to all artists, to find self-fulfillment in giving others pleasure and happiness.⁴⁹ We could say that Karen Blixen offers a profoundly pragmatist message, a message which insists that art occupies a very special position, and that each action and each experience, a dinner in this case, may deserve the name of art. This is how we could interpret the (already cited) pronouncement Priscilla Parhusip Ferguson, a researcher of French culinary tradition, makes: “A second article of faith in *Babette's Feast* is the certainty of the instantaneous and direct power of art (...) art touches individuals of every station, even against their will.”⁵⁰

From the viewpoint of somaesthetics, far more interesting than the change of habitus is the question whether bodily practices, including new culinary experiences, may effect social change.

Babette's Feast, albeit masterfully evocative, is but an individual example of how culinary culture may launch change in internal social ties. It would be highly pertinent to reflect on ways in which contemporary culinary culture may perform the same function of transforming cultural habits of a community, yet on the mass scale this time. Post-modern culture is a culture of consumption, also in the literal sense of the term. We are interested in eating, read about eating, watch cooking shows, go to restaurants, cook, and love banqueting. Research shows that in planning holidays people more and more frequently take the local cuisine of their destination into account. A question arises whether tourists and the audience of extraordinarily popular culinary TV channels learn to open up to otherness as they immerse in new cooking cultures and/or find out about new recipes.⁵¹ Discussing the issue, I believe, we should rely on Shusterman's division of somaesthetics into representational and experiential components. By analogy, a similar differentiation could be identified in culinary practices. The feast Babette serves to the

47 For more details, see “Somaesthetics and the Art of Eating,” in: *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*, ed. Wojciech Małecki, Amsterdam-N.Y.: Rodopi, 2014.

48 See Ferguson, *Accounting...*, p. 190.

49 “The happiness is the accomplishment of great art. And of great love, of the material with which the artist works, and of the public that she serves.” Ferguson, *Accounting...*, p. 192.

50 Ferguson, *Accounting...*, p. 193.

51 The belief in the dialogic character of eating underpins artistic practices of Rirkrit Tiravanija. The cosmopolitan artist, a Buenos Aires-born Thai who divides his time between New York and Berlin, uses meals to build temporary communities around the table. He believes that eating is a message comprehensible to all. In his performances, he prepared red and green curries – the dishes characteristic of his native Thailand. In this way, the meals turned into deliberate artistic gestures and communications of openness. An invitation to the table is, at the same time, an invitation to understanding and friendship.

villagers on the coast of Jutland is, undoubtedly, an equivalent of experiential somaesthetics. It expands their world perception, and changes social relations in which the community members are entangled. It meets the basic criterion of experiential somaesthetics, that is, a holistic cultivation and transformation of the individual. Where is the boundary, however, between the surface and the depth of a culinary experience? Shusterman's concept furnishes us with a conceptual apparatus to analyze this issue, and can serve as a starting point for the study of the emancipatory potential of contemporary culinary culture.

Notes

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