Chapter Six

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THE (EXTENSIVE) PLEASURES OF EATING

Or, Why Did this Meal Suddenly Become Less Delicious When I Found Out My Server Has No Health Insurance, the Cook Worked 90 Hours Last Week, and the Recipes Were Published in a Cookbook Whose Author Collected them from the Women of South India, Whom She Fails to Credit, Even in Her Acknowledgements?

I.

In a recent review[1] of vegetarian cookbooks for his magazine *Cook's Illustrated,* editor Christopher Kimball writes:

> Vegetarianism as a lifestyle ain't what it used to be. Deborah Madison, the reigning queen of this culinary niche and author of Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone (Broadway Books, 1997), admits to a taste for red meat and has, on occasion, been seen consuming a sizzling steak in public. Mollie Katzen, author of The Moosewood Cookbook (Ten Speed Press, 1977), espouses wholesome cooking, "whether that contains meat or not." And Madhur Jaffrey has now turned her considerable talents to the subject of vegetarian cooking, but from an international perspective, bringing numerous ethnic specialties together in one giant tome. Vegetarian cooking is growing up, shedding tie-dye for L.L. Bean and taking on a more sophisticated, less politically sensitive palate. At last, it seems, vegetarian cooking can be welcomed into the fold of legitimate culinary pursuits now that it is first and foremost about taste and technique rather than health and politics.[2]

This passage made me frantic the first time I read it. After thinking about it for a while, I came up with the following set of interconnected reasons why. I begin with the most trivial (and most tangential), and tack my way into the more important, which will be the topic of this chapter.

1. Kimball writes that Jaffrey has “now turned her considerable talents” to vegetarianism—as if her most recent work were the first book of vegetarian cookery she had written. But in fact, Jaffrey wrote another cookbook, entitled *Worlds of the East Vegetarian Cooking* a dozen years ago; she has been *writing* about vegetarian cuisine for at least that long.

2. This error, while trivial in one sense, strikes me as quite revealing and disturbing in another. As Kimball well knows, Jaffrey comes from—and regularly writes about—India, a country of vast, varied, and *sophisticated* vegetarian culinary practices, growing out of several different religious traditions—a country in which vegetarian cooking is not only deeply established, but regarded as perhaps *the* “legitimate culinary pursuit” (to use Kimball’s phrase). It is particularly galling to find him dismissing vegetarian cuisines “of the past” and praising those of “the present” by praising an author who *comes from* one of the world’s oldest and richest vegetarian cultures.

3. This oversight makes Kimball’s claim that “we” are “now” making vegetarian cuisine culinarily sophisticated both ahistorical and acontextual. Never mind centuries of Indian cookery that arise out of the practices of Hinduism and other religious traditions; never mind centuries of Buddhist cookery in such culinary centers as Japan and China; to Kimball, vegetarianism is *only now* becoming culinarily sophisticated, because only now is it being developed by people who supposedly put

taste before politics. (People who shop at L.L. Bean know to keep their politics out of the kitchen, apparently.[3])

4. His evidence for the claim that vegetarians (in the United States) are actually putting taste before politics seems to consist of his observation that several well respected authors of vegetarian cookbooks are known to eat meat, at least on occasion. The reasoning seems to go like this: anyone who eats meat can't be one of those strident vegetarians who only care about animals, and if the best and the brightest of our vegetarian authors are among those who sometimes eat meat, well, then vegetarianism has hung up its manifestos and is ready for the big time. Correlatively, if a meat eater is actually interested in vegetarian cooking, it must be because there is something genuinely (read: aesthetically) interesting about vegetarian cuisine. Meat eating, apparently, is apolitical, and can have the effect of neutralizing the moral and political crankiness of vegetarianism.

5. (Here things start to get interesting, as I read between the lines, tunneling underneath Kimball's review to address the kinds of cultural presuppositions about vegetarians on which I think his review relies.) Kimball's review implies that vegetarian cooking has actually been thwarted aesthetically by its practitioners' emphasis on political concerns such as the welfare of animals, and health concerns such as an interest in reducing fat consumption. (Given his silence on the great vegetarian cuisines of Asia, we might also surmise that a commitment to a religious tradition thwarts the development of a cuisine.) Such concerns, extraneous to the *proper* aesthetic appreciation of food, have made vegetarian cuisine unsophisticated and, well, just plain bad-tasting. Vegetarianism was immature (aesthetically immature) precisely *because* it was politically sensitive.

This view of vegetarian food probably sounds quite familiar. Since at least the sixties, vegetarian food has had a reputation in the United States as the food of health faddists, anti-war hippies, humorless feminists, and cloth-shoe-wearing tree-huggers; so-called vegetarian staples like tofu and brown rice have been the butt of innumerable jokes.[4] "Everybody knows" that vegetarians don't care if food tastes good, so long as it saves the earth. "Everyone knows" that, at the very least, political commitments leave vegetarians unconcerned about whether the foods they create and eat are aesthetically pleasing; at most, those commitments actually prevent the vegetarian from producing aesthetically desirable foods.

But now vegetarian food has an opportunity to become "a legitimate culinary pursuit," as it loses, or at least loosens, its political commitments.

6. In making his pronouncement about the bright future of vegetarian cuisine, Kimball presumes a dichotomy between "culinary sophistication" and "political sensitivity"—between "taste and technique" on the one hand and "health and politics" on the other. Such a presumption is hardly unique to Kimball, of course; it is a standard feature of many mainstream views of vegetarianism. Vegetarian cooking, by choosing to emphasize politics, health or religion, places itself on the wrong side of the divide. It isn't just that aesthetic and political/moral concerns are completely different concerns; it is that the pursuit of the one (at least when that one is "ethical concerns") spells the ruination of the other. You cannot both produce sophisticated cuisine and pursue an ethical, social or political agenda.

This is just the point I want to challenge. This chapter is my attempt to develop the claim that there are some experiences that are aesthetically rich in part precisely *because* they are morally rich.[5]

Vegetarianism probably represents the most familiar case of alleged politics-over-aesthetics on the contemporary culinary scene in the U.S., but it is certainly not the only culinary practice that chooses the wrong side of the divide. Other contenders might include organic farming, buying locally grown food, and choosing to buy from worker-owned cooperatives (unless, of course, one can prove that one does these things to procure aesthetically superior food).[6] The proper relationship between aesthetics and ethics/politics is clear; place "taste and technique" at the forefront of culinary art, and minimize, ignore or deny, concerns of an ethical or political nature, unless they can actually be shown to have a direct bearing on taste. An illustration: in a program I once saw about the raising of veal calves, Julia Child was interviewed about the relative merits and demerits of veal calves that were allowed to run around during their attenuated lives. Child asserted—no doubt accurately—that the taste of this free-range veal was utterly different from that of pen-raised veal—and went on to argue that it was utterly inferior to the latter. She expressed genuine outrage at the suggestion that someone might choose to eat a product she regarded as culinarily inadequate, for a reason so flimsy as the relative happiness of an animal. For Child, it seemed clear that ethical concerns constituted an actual obstacle to aesthetic commitments—an obstacle to be resisted at all costs.

II.

How well does this dictum—if it is about aesthetic taste, it can't be about ethical concerns, and if it's about ethical concerns it can't be about taste—serve or account for our actual aesthetic appreciation of food? How well does it describe or account for the kinds of aesthetic decisions that a cook makes? If adhered to, would it improve cuisine—and enlighten our experiences of it? My answers are, "poorly," "poorly," and "not likely." Why?

Adopting a sharp dichotomy between aesthetic and ethical considerations would impoverish our aesthetic experiences of food, by drawing our attention away from many of the very things that give food its significance. An aesthetic of food ought to be able to help us reflect on aspects of Thanksgiving dinner or a Passover Seder or a meal at the local organic vegan restaurant other than the fluffiness and savoriness of the respective mashed potatoes, matzo balls, and kelp puffs. It ought to give us tools for reflecting on the ways history, heritage, religious conviction—and, yes, environment and ecology—enter into our experience of the meal. After all, most of us are mostly today not ashamed to admit that such "extra-aesthetic" elements enhance our *aesthetic* appreciation of paintings, poems, musical compositions, even constitute an essential element of them.[7] So why retain it for food?

A. More pointedly, why denigrate the role of political, social and ethical commitments in cuisine? Why are these seen as a contaminating influence? In the case of someone like Kimball, I believe he criticizes what might be called "political vegetarianism" out of a sincere desire to shore up the aesthetic legitimacy of food. Kimball, like many food writers, obviously *believes* wholeheartedly that food can be an object of aesthetic appreciation; indeed, many believe the stronger claim that food is an actual art. But of course not everyone agrees—food is on decidedly shaky ground in most aesthetic theories. If you're trying to make it clear even to the dubious that food is art, then vegetarian cuisine—with its commitment to things other than "taste and technique," with its reputation for tasting bad—needs to be hidden in the closet, whipped into shape, or publicly ridiculed and drummed out of the category of "cuisine". Otherwise, cuisine-in-general will never be able to take its rightful place in the art pantheon.

Those who advocate such a route to legitimize the aesthetic value of food put me in mind of a practitioner of the social sciences who attempts to prove that anthropology and psychology are "real" (read: hard) sciences. This social scientist polices the ranks of the various disciplines, criticizing anyone who, for example, tries to use autobiography in their work and call it social science. The self-appointed police officer knows that the social sciences have a much lower chance of being accepted as hard sciences if practitioners use such unorthodox methods. Autobiographical anthropologists threaten the scientific legitimacy of the social sciences *in general* in the same way that vegetarian chefs who "put politics before taste" threaten the aesthetic legitimacy of cuisine in general. If you're worried about your own claims to membership in some category, you're going to be doubly vigilant in your efforts to root out anything that might be taken as a counterexample. You are *not*, for example, going to be interested in making room for renegades who are trying to expand the methodologies of science to include autobiography. You are going to interpret science as narrowly as possible—and make sure that all practitioners of the social sciences adhere to this narrow interpretation.

Food loyalists, eager to prove to the dubious that food is an art form, frequently engage in just such self-policing, by severely restricting the scope of aesthetically relevant features of food. Carolyn Korsmeyer, in her book *Making Sense of Taste,* discusses several theorists who attempt to negotiate food into the category of fine art.[8] Such arguments tend to be characterized by very narrow readings of *both* aesthetic criteria *and* the activity of eating.

For example, Korsmeyer notes that most defendants of food as art focus their attention very narrowly on the sensory qualities of food—primarily its taste, but also its smell and appearance. And they end up resting their defenses on such

extraordinary instances of "eating" as wine tasting, in which the potation is literally spat out after it has been tasted. But even *using* this stringent (and bizarre) conception of food, even those who defend the art-ness of food describe it as a minor art form, since (among other things), taste is a lower sense than hearing and seeing, and since food doesn't seem to refer—doesn't seem to "mean" anything outside of itself, an accusation that leaves taste stranded in the realm of the utterly subjective.[9]

Such a position is characteristic of those who reduce the aesthetic appreciation of food to its sensuous qualities alone. But why take this approach? As Korsmeyer says, "it would be a sacrifice of richness and breadth for the significance of foods if this were the only grounds on which it could be aesthetically justified."[10] To restrict our aesthetic appreciation of food to "the savor of the tastes themselves" means that we lose access to "the terrain of deeper aesthetic significance that foods display in their practical contexts, including ritual, ceremony, and commemoration."[11] Thanksgiving, Passover and vegan restaurant meals are significant for reasons beyond fluffiness and savoriness—or even fluffiness, savoriness and a pleasing golden-brown color. There is more to the aesthetics of food than meets the tongue—or even the tongue and the nose together. Critics miss the point of 1960's style vegetarian food, if they write it off as aesthetically unsophisticated because its practitioners were motivated by deep political commitments. For Korsmeyer, choosing to weigh the aesthetic value of a cuisine on the basis of taste and technique alone means impoverishing oneself with no good reason.

B. Korsmeyer herself is actually deliciously uninterested in arguing food into the category of art, per se. Among her reasons: "the concept of art, dominated as it is today by the idea of *fine* art, is a poor category to capture the nature of foods and their consumption"—poor precisely because fine art exists in a climate deeply influenced

by the idea that "aesthetic qualities of works of art...inhere in the works themselves, free of surrounding context."[12] In other words, Korsmeyer doesn't want to argue that food is art, because making such an argument seems to require her to adopt just the impoverished set of aesthetically-relevant criteria that many advocates of the food-is-art view adopt. It is too big a sacrifice, for too little gain. (Big deal if we get to treat food as art, only to have to ignore all the aspects of it that give it significance.)

On the other hand, Korsmeyer *is* interested in making a case for the *aesthetic significance* of food; she develops a notion of the aesthetic that is rich, complex and contextual. It is a notion of the aesthetic in which the ethical, political, social, religious aspects of cooking and eating are anything but irrelevant to aesthetic appreciation. And while she doesn't say so in so many words, I think she would like the aesthetic appreciation of food to become more of a paradigm for the aesthetic appreciation of art.

I am interested in Korsmeyer's theory because I think it presents an important challenge to the way of thinking on which Kimball's view relies. I think it more fully represents the kinds of aesthetic experiences of food I actually have, *when I experience food aesthetically.* (Our fullest, most aesthetically rich aesthetic experiences of food are, I believe, just those in which we attend to many aspects of its context.) Korsmeyer's theory pushes me to expand the scope of the aesthetically relevant. I look to her theory to give me a way to understand how the aesthetic value of food can actually depend upon such ethical considerations as the working conditions of the people who prepared the food, the environmental impact of growing the food, and other ostensibly unaesthetic qualities. I want to consider the possibility that at least sometimes, the presence of moral commitments is actually a necessary condition for certain kinds of aesthetic value. What would it be like for my aesthetic

experience of food to be deeply imbued by the ethical context of its creation? How would my various food practices—growing, cooking, eating, eliminating—be transformed, were I to seek to create such multilayered aesthetic experiences? What I seek is a way to make aesthetic sense/aesthetic relevance of the matter of who grew my tomatoes and how they live—or even who is the source of my recipes, and how were her or his contributions compensated or acknowledged?[13]

To lay the groundwork for this argument, I begin by explicating key aspects of Korsmeyer's theory.

III.

A. The single most important feature of Korsmeyer's theory (for her, as well as for my, argument) is its cognitivist approach. Most theorists writing about food have argued that taste "tells us something only about the subject doing the tasting. It yields no information about objects in the world."[14] Food, these theorists further explain, doesn't "mean" anything beyond itself—it does not refer, represent, denote. Korsmeyer disagrees. Food *does* have meanings; it connects to objects in the world in all sorts of ways. If this seems implausible, consider, for a moment, just two of her minor examples. Croissants were invented to *represent* the Austrians' defeat of the Ottoman Turks in 1683, and chicken soup *expresses* comfort to someone suffering from a head cold. (I understand that many consider the story of croissants' origin to be discredited. The legitimacy or illegitimacy of the story, while certainly relevant for some purposes, is not particularly relevant to Korsmeyer's point; another, more credible, origins story would do just as well.) Borrowing from Nelson Goodman's cognitivist theory, she invites her readers to consider food as one of Goodman's symbol systems. She argues that food is *pervasively* symbolic. Croissants and chicken

soup only begin to tell the story, a story that also includes everything from candy corn to the bread and wine of communion to the bear meat eaten by a character in the novel *Cold Mountain*.

She uses this starting point to show *how* food means something beyond itself—and how understanding the multiple layers of food's meaning can enable us to plumb its full aesthetic depths. Rather than "zeroing out" the political commitments of vegetarians, the environmental commitments of organic vegetable farmers, the religious commitments of cooks in a *glatt* kosher restaurant, or the family history of the diner eating kimchee, this method invites us to take them into account as sources of meaning—meaning that can deepen and enrich the literal savor of the food in our mouths.

How does the theory accomplish this? Symbol systems function as "systems of meaning that have obvious cognitive functions."[15] By "cognitive" or "symbolic functions" Korsmeyer and Goodman mean the various ways that symbols symbolize—the ways they point to something outside themselves. As Korsmeyer notes, Goodman's theory does not sharply separate the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic; the same kinds of symbolic functions can be found in artworks and in objects with no particular aesthetic significance. Not all instances of representation, for example, are aesthetically significant. Furthermore, in different contexts, the same symbol may be interpreted in ways that highlight or minimize its aesthetic significance. Korsmeyer writes that "rather than presenting necessary and sufficient conditions to define the aesthetic, Goodman identifies five 'symptoms' of the aesthetic"—five different cognitive functions that aesthetic objects tend to manifest.[16] Three of them are particularly significant for aesthetic experiences involving food; they include representation, exemplification, and expression (which Korsmeyer,

following Goodman, terms "metaphorical exemplification"). I will sketch out her descriptions of each, as a way to show how an aesthetic experience is constituted out of layers of meaning.

1. First, *representation*. A candy skull *represents* the real thing to a Day of the Dead celebrant. Korsmeyer lists dozens of such foods that represent something outside themselves, generally by simply looking like something else. (Other examples I thought of include ginger pigs, Hanukah geld, and a cake made in the shape of Mount Rainier.) Such resemblances generally do not amount to much aesthetically (we might be amazed by the inclusion of astonishingly realistic glaciers in the appropriate places on the faces of the carrot cake Mount Rainier, but they won't bring us to rank the cake with the Mona Lisa); nevertheless, the sheer number of representations points to "the pervasiveness of meaning in food."[17] Those who argue that food doesn't refer beyond itself will have to somehow account for the fact that "an enormous amount of what we put in our mouths represents (in one sense or another) something else."[18] And they will have to come up with a different ground for denying the aesthetic relevance of food, since many foods meet this criterion, but meeting it alone is not a sufficient condition for making a food aesthetically significant or valuable.

So, if the actual fact of visual representation is of no particular aesthetic consequence, then of what aesthetic interest is representation in food? Korsmeyer's answer points to context. She suggests that reflecting on a familiar reference, or coming to understand an unfamiliar one, can, and often does, add a layer of *aesthetic* meaning to a food. For example, in coming to learn that a pretzel was originally shaped to look like the arms of a monk in prayer, "the experience of eating a pretzel is transformed very slightly and perhaps achieves the aesthetic predicate 'witty.'"[19] And

for a patriotic Austrian, learning that the shape of the croissant was inspired by the crescent moon on the Turkish flag (so that they are symbolically eating Turkey, relishing its defeat each time they eat one), adds a layer of meaning to the food that makes the experience of eating a croissant considerably different from (and arguably more aesthetically significant than), say, eating a bagel. (For me, the aesthetically pleasurable experience of biting through buttery, papery layers of a well made croissant and finding its soft, yeasty interior has been altered somewhat bitterly, by learning that even this wonderful delicacy is seen by some as a kind of war memorial. Does it still *taste* the same to me? Part of what I want to argue, ultimately, is that it doesn't. Or, more accurately, that the complex aesthetic experience of eating a croissant—and of which literal tasting is only a part—has been altered with the introduction of this new information. Of course it's been altered yet again by learning that this is inaccurate history—now I'm led to wonder about the appeal of such an apparently-false anecdote.) On the more elaborate end of the spectrum of representation, the fantastical cakes of the 19th century chef Antoine Carême, fashioned to look like everything from Greek and Roman ruins to Chinese pavilions, reveal such skill and beauty that we can understand why Carême described pastry making as the chief form of architecture. While we might not agree with Carême's grandiose assessment, we would nonetheless be moved to agree that his creations merit aesthetic approbation for the cleverness and subtlety of their replication.

As Korsmeyer points out, representations of these sorts generally depend upon vision for their effect—not taste. (However, she does note that a Thanksgiving meal might be said to represent the first Thanksgiving—a kind of representation that is not visual.) But whereas others might see this dependence on vision as a reason to discount the aesthetic significance *for food* of such representations (since food is

supposedly all about taste), Korsmeyer argues that it instead "illustrates the unremarkable fact that the experience of eating involves more than one sense."[20] Eating also engages our senses of smell, sight, touch, even sound. (Listen the next time you bite into a croissant.)

Korsmeyer acknowledges that representation constitutes a fairly limited aesthetic element of food—even the elaborate stunt cookery of a Carême serves a chiefly decorative function. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that attention to food's representative properties already moves us beyond the sphere in which Kimball's review makes aesthetic judgments about cuisine. While someone like Kimball would likely agree that *appearance* is important—foods must *look* beautiful, and must visually display the cook's knowledge of proper technique—such a person would not, in general, regard *resemblance* as contributing any aesthetic value to a dish *qua* cuisine. If such representation gave the food item any aesthetic value at all, it would be as a sculpture or painting, or as a piece of some decorative visual art like embroidery. Such an understanding of food pares away aspects of our experience of food, to get at an aesthetic core of "taste and technique"; Korsmeyer builds up the aesthetic significance of food out of just such rejected aspects. One considerable source of fun in vegetarian food derives from the whimsy that inspired vegetarian cooks to create "turkeys" out of everything in sight--nut loaf, tofu, mashed potatoes. (Surely everyone eating such a turkey simulacrum had to remove their tongues from their cheeks to do so.)

2. The next cognitive function Korsmeyer discusses is *exemplification*, which comes in two forms. An apple may exemplify redness, crispness, tartness. Chicken soup exemplifies saltiness, blandness. A bowl of cereal *exemplifies* breakfast to an American eater. Stated most plainly, exemplification attends to the fact that foods

possess particular qualities—taste qualities, as with the apple, but also qualities like belonging to a particular meal, as with cereal. Exemplification describes the fact that the eater's attention is drawn to these qualities.

As Korsmeyer notes, most aesthetic writing about food focuses on taste exemplification—on the ways food manifests the qualities it is expected to have.[21] Indeed, the countless parodies of vegetarian cooking one finds in popular culture tend to rely on the stereotype of humorless vegetarians who use ingredients in ways that fail to allow their exemplary qualities to speak, or who select ingredients that exemplify unappealing qualities (like blandness), simply because they meet some set of political criteria. Insert tofu, brown rice and bean jokes here.

While most aestheticians focus on taste exemplification, Korsmeyer's reading of exemplification goes deeper than this, as her inclusion of the cereal example illustrates. Here we can see why Korsmeyer understands exemplification as a cognitive function; foods come to "'mean' the meal that they provide"[22]. Cereal exemplifies breakfast for an American because it possesses "implicit properties"[23] as a result of its location within a particular social context—a context that may be as small as a particular family, or as large as an entire nation. It may include elements of religious practice, food availability, ethnic heritage, constraints of work life, ethical commitments, or any number of other aspects of one's surroundings, all of which combine to make certain foods embody—*mean*—particular times and/or places. While a caramel roll *meant* breakfast to me, to my Swedish college roommate, it threatened violent illness—to her, fluorescent pink, salty, fishy caviar in a tube spelled seven a.m. Foods possess properties as a result of occupying "a particular place in the rhythm of nourishment that is represented by mealtimes."[24]

While such exemplified properties regularly go unnoticed (who recognizes the ubiquitous?), a change in the context brings them into sharp focus. Being in the presence of my roommate made it very clear to me that the connection between caramel rolls and seven a.m. was all about context. Ditto when I visited her in Sweden, and was confronted with what looked, in the morning hours, like a tube of toothpaste on the breakfast table. Tastes, Korsmeyer concludes, are always *embedded* in meaning—foods exemplify different properties as a result of the different contexts they come to inhabit.

(While it is somewhat beside my present point, I am interested in expanding this notion of exemplified properties beyond the "rhythm of nourishment" that Korsmeyer describes, to include what we might call the "agricultural rhythm" and the "rhythm of preparation." For, just as foods occupy particular times in the day, they also occupy particular times of the year, and particular places on the globe, among other things. And just as Korsmeyer suggests we can come to render explicit the implicit meanings lodged in the structure of our meals, so too, I think, can we make explicit the implicit meanings buried in our agricultural and cooking practices. Will we be able to taste them, the way we can taste the "wrongness" of caviar for breakfast? I don't know; but fortunately, on Korsmeyer's account, tasting is not the end of the story. But am I extending the notion of exemplification too far here, by extending it to qualities of a food that may not be literally perceptible by the tongue? I don't think so--but I may be wrong, in which case I need another place to put them. And I'm not comfortable putting them into the other possible category, the one I'll describe in a moment: metaphorical expression.)

To take Kimball as an example again, he is sometimes comfortable acknowledging the aesthetic importance of this aspect of cuisine. In editorials in his

magazine, he often waxes rhapsodic about the relationship between times of the year and the foods he is eating on his farm in Vermont. It is clear that at least some elements of context are aesthetically important to him—seasonality and location, for example. It might not be a tremendous stretch for him to include in that category such things as the working conditions of those who grow his food, or the lives of those animals that become his food.

3. Apples may exemplify crispness and tartness, but in other contexts, they may *express*—or *metaphorically* exemplify—anything from temptation to poison to motherhood to appreciation for a teacher, depending, of course, upon the contexts in which they are embedded. Metaphorical exemplification is the third symptom of the aesthetic particularly important for food. Sometimes we identify an expressive function in foods because of a natural property they possess—bitterness and sweetness are two common examples of flavors that come to express experiences that we describe with the same adjectives. A tongue-in-cheek organization does "research" on the meaning of bitter melons, the bitterest food humans normally consume. "Do bitter personalities grow bitterer bitter melons?" is one of the questions they currently are "researching."[25] Any number of common metaphorical expressions attests to this cognitive feature of food—eating crow, sour grapes, the sweet taste of victory, etc. But Korsmeyer takes us into, and beyond, the everyday level of food's expressiveness, to reveal the aesthetic potential of this cognitive property. She illustrates the depth of "complex propositional understanding" that even a simple flavor like salt can possess, by retelling an old English fairy tale in which the relationship between salt and meat comes to stand for a daughter's love for her father. In the story, the father comes to understand the depth of his daughter's love (which she describes as "the way fresh meat loves salt"), when he is served a meal without

any salt. The father comes to understand his daughter's love with his very body, as he takes the savorless meat into his mouth. Korsmeyer concludes, "This is the force of 'aesthetic' apprehension: that some truth or realization of discovery is delivered in a way that touches one intimately, that focuses and concentrates insight with the poignant immediacy of the blind father's taste of saltless meat."[26]

It is not difficult to multiply examples of food's expressiveness—and it is also not hard to notice how deeply contextual such examples are. For example, while chicken soup might express thoughtfulness and comfort to someone whose mother made it for them as a child when they had a cold, to a vegetarian that same soup might express violence and wanton cruelty—the taste of the soup becoming inseparable from the life of the chicken that flavors it. Similarly, the smell of bacon might, for some, evoke the love of the grandmother who made BLT sandwiches, during summer vacations, while to someone who keeps kosher, the smell of such *trayf* meat might make them literally ill. And while a meal in an Ethiopian restaurant might spell comfort to both my New York-raised Jewish friend Naomi and my Somali acquaintance Jamila, their experiences of comfort will probably bear little resemblance to each other, rooted as they are in such dramatically different contexts.

As Korsmeyer, interpreting Goodman, shows, aesthetic experiences happen where the project of drawing out symbolic connections is the most nuanced and layered—their multilayered character explains "the insight and emotional depth for which art is valued."[27] Simply put, there is a lot to draw upon in an experience that has depth and complexity. Recognizing the similarity between a triangular orange-and-white piece of candy and a kernel of corn is unlikely to be an aesthetically rich experience—not much room for subtlety and not many layers of meaning here. (As Korsmeyer observes, not all experiences of food are aesthetically significant—but this

is hardly to its detriment. Neither, it can be argued, are doodles on the phone pad, or the music they play while you are trapped on an elevator.) We must look to much more complex and nuanced food experiences than this to see the aesthetic depths of which food is capable. The fairytale points us in such a direction. Ceremonial meals present us with still more examples—examples in which the various symbolic uses of foods combine in multiple ways to create events of considerable aesthetic weight. Korsmeyer points to Thanksgiving, the Passover Seder, and communion as three meals that manifest, often in deep and profound ways, all of the kinds of symbolic connections I've discussed—representation (wafer and wine denote body and blood—even become them in some denominations of Christianity), exemplification (warmth, savoriness and heaviness of Thanksgiving foods), and expression (salt water expresses the tears shed by the Israelites in captivity). The fact that these symbolic connections are, in each case, multiple, and are encased in ceremonies that emerge out of, and take place in, multilayered cultural contexts, all contribute to the aesthetic potential of such ceremonial meals.

(I must note a consequence of Korsmeyer's theory that may strike readers as ironic. If we adopt her position, we are forced to acknowledge that food may taste bad and yet be aesthetically very significant. On Kimball's account, this of course would make no sense, because the aesthetic value of food is so completely tied to its taste/smell. For Korsmeyer, however, while it is certainly extremely lovely if, at a Seder, the harosset is made with crispy, flavorful apples and the matzo comes fresh from a bakery rather than a box, much of the aesthetic significance of the meal will remain, even if the quality of the flavors is poor. So long as the foods are recognizable, they get to count, as it were. To require food to be always delicious in order to be

aesthetically significant would be the equivalent of requiring that paintings always be beautiful.)

B. My comment about contexts hints at a second central feature of Korsmeyer's aesthetic theory—her conviction that food is communal, and that to understand it as aesthetically significant requires attention to its communality. For Korsmeyer, it is communal in at least two senses.

1. First, literal, sensory taste is a sense that is both inward- *and* outward directed; in her words, it is an "intimate" sense. (Korsmeyer develops her conception of taste by carefully and exhaustively discussing theories of taste—both physiological and aesthetic—to show that those conceptions that understand taste as a purely subjective, inward looking sensation are inadequate. I will not rehearse her very compelling arguments here.) The operation of eating results in external objects literally becoming part of oneself; given that the objects in question are so often *presented* to us by someone else (and, in our culture, given that that someone else is often a total stranger serving you in a restaurant or fast food place), the activity of eating involves risk and trust (I have to believe that you won't poison me or make me sick, intentionally or accidentally). As such, it is no surprise that many cultural bonds focus on eating; when you depend upon another for your safe sustenance, the potential exists for a deep connection to that other. (In commodity culture, rather than developing a deep connection, we tend to develop legislation to protect ourselves from dangerous food. While this might appear to minimize the need to trust others, it more accurately just shifts the focus of our trust to government inspectors.) Little wonder, then, that so many rituals of eating have grown up around this feature of it. Korsmeyer notes that Bedouin tradition dictates that once you share salt and bread with someone, you are responsible for that person's protection.[28] And Aristotle cites

the parable describing friends as people who have eaten salt together.[29] Any aesthetic understanding of food must always come back to, or remember its roots in, this fundamental fact about eating—that it places us in intimate contact with any number of others. (We can perhaps best see these intimate connections when something goes wrong with the connection—when, for example, a mass-produced food is found to have been contaminated. I had a small experience of the degree to which I trust unknown others—and am thus "intimate" with them in Korsmeyer's sense—when I opened a foil packet of soup and out dropped a large metal nut. Suddenly I was acutely aware of how dependent I was upon others for ensuring that the things I put in my mouth would not poison me.) In the United States, and in fact in industrialized nations all over the world, that ever-expanding group of others is, by and large, anonymous, so we tend to erase them from the story. (We'd rather not be responsible to the folks who "share" the fruits of their labors with us, thank you very much.) But to ignore the intimacy of taste as if it were aesthetically irrelevant is, in effect, to make wine tasting—tasting without ingesting—the standard for eating.

Such intimacy is not only a burden, however. Participating in this activity makes us vulnerable in a way that experiencing arts based on the "distal senses" of hearing and seeing normally does not. You can literally die—or be horribly betrayed—by taking into yourself something that you ought not. But Korsmeyer also points out that the possibilities of horror are the flip side of the possibilities of community, friendship, etc. that food enables.[30] This is true of special as well as mundane instances of eating. The Passover feast, and a meal of the year's last garden tomatoes shared with a neighbor, both represent instances of the community that can form around, or be strengthened by, an eating experience. Eating is rooted in this

"profound foundation of trust." Surely that fact colors this experience in ways so profound that our aesthetic system needs to be able to address them.[31]

2. Food preparation and eating are communal in a second way. Foods exist in cultural contexts, and the symbolic meanings they have are meanings they acquire in context. Aesthetic appreciation of any depth requires that we have at least some access to this cultural context--to the community out of which this food has developed its meanings. This might mean being a part of, or knowing something about, the religious practice, the historical significance, the social convention, or the family tradition of a dish or a meal. It might mean knowing something about, or possessing, the Scandinavian penchant for fish and caviar. Absent this understanding, the food becomes literally *unintelligible* (note the cognition word), even if it tastes good in some one- or two-dimensional way. I think, for instance, of how ill equipped I would be to participate in a tea ceremony, because I know so little about it. The tea I tasted would quite literally not be the same drink as the one consumed by a knowledgeable participant; I would swill down a beverage, while they would participate in a multi-layered experience, one in which everything from the style of the cup to the art on the walls of the tea house, to the manner in which the tea was poured could evoke a response from them.

A more everyday example of tea drinking will illustrate the importance of context more concretely. Recently, a student came to see me about a paper with which she was struggling. I knew she was from Japan, though I didn't know much beyond that. I offered her a cup of *genmaicha*, a green tea mixed with roasted brown rice that I knew to be Japanese in origin. She accepted—something of a surprise to me, since she wasn't really eager to prolong the visit to my office—and then this very shy, very quiet student proceeded to drink the tea with obvious and deep pleasure. I asked her if

genmaicha was common in Japan. "Yes," she replied, "very common," but then said nothing more, as she closed her eyes and drank. I felt oddly like a voyeur, and also strangely left out, watching this woman go on a little trip home while drinking a cup of tea. I wanted to know about this tea—when would she typically drink it? how would it be prepared? among whom was it common?—and worried about whether I'd prepared it at all correctly. Was it too strong? Too weak? Was it okay to give it to her in a mug? Was the water the right temperature? Absent any knowledge of her context, and in the presence of someone to whom this drink was as familiar as home, my experience of this tea suddenly became both more frustrating and more full of potential—frustrating, because there was so much I didn't know, but full of potential, because I was coming to see that it was there to be known, and to see that knowing it would enhance my appreciation of this tea.

(Thinking about attention to context as an element of aesthetic appreciation, it strikes me that Kimball's emphasis on the importance of technique as an aesthetic criterion could be understood as attention to context. When you appreciate what you know to be the complex preparations that have gone into the making of a seemingly simple dish in a fine nouvelle cuisine restaurant, you are actually relying on your knowledge of context. You can only appreciate that dish fully because you know something about the culinary tradition in which it is situated. Without a very detailed understanding of that context, the food before you may seem to you to be ordinary, or even bad.)

It would be ridiculous to try to make any general statements about the ways food is rooted in social context. But any aesthetic that hopes to address the deep potential of food needs to pay attention to that rootedness. And in paying attention to

human connection, one is inevitably drawn into consideration of the ethical and political dimensions of our intertwining.

C. Another aspect of Korsmeyer's account, that I will not explore here, is her observation that food is temporal.[32] Foods are fresh, and then they rot. They are in season, and then they are out. Eating itself takes time; it cannot be accomplished in an instant.[33]

IV.

In contrast to views of food-as-art that reduce it to the experience of tongue and noes, I want a food aesthetic that draws upon all its potential layers of symbolic meaning—including layers that are ethical and political in nature. As someone with a variety of ethical commitments that I take very seriously, and upon which I nevertheless often have difficulty acting, I am interested in increasing their hold on me by situating them also within an aesthetic framework. As someone interested in encouraging others to see the ethical consequences of their food choices, someone who realizes that her entreaties often make her sound like a shrill harpy—everybody's least favorite dinner guest—I am frankly interested in the strategic value of being able to plead my case on aesthetic, as well as ethical and political grounds. Therefore, I want to explore the prescriptive power of Korsmeyer's theory.

It may seem odd to use her theory prescriptively. Korsmeyer, after all, observes that aesthetic worth/value can be present even in really painful experiences. But while Korsmeyer is suggesting that painful features of our eating *are* parts of our aesthetic experience, I wish to use her work to make a claim about the sorts of foods we ought to create in the future. I am suggesting that we ought to promote foods that enable a certain kind of aesthetic pleasure. There is a subcategory of experiences—pleasurable aesthetic experiences—in which moral concerns are a necessary

contributor to aesthetic pleasure. We ought to try to create such experiences *and* we ought to cultivate the kind of aesthetic faculty that would enable us *to* appreciate them, aesthetically. We ought to make decisions using this faculty, to enable ourselves to have extensive pleasures.

In that spirit, in this last section of the chapter, I want to think about how to move from using her theory to *describe* aesthetic experiences, to using it as a way to *create, expand and enrich* my aesthetic experiences of food.[34] I would like to increase my capacity for what Korsmeyer calls "aesthetic apprehension," for receiving those "truths or realizations" that are "delivered in a way that touches one intimately, that focuses and concentrates insight," as well as my capacity to create the sorts of eating experiences that have the multi-dimensionality that will enable them to serve in this capacity.[35] And I think Korsmeyer gives me the tools to do so—the means I can use to begin to pay different kinds of attention to my food experiences, and thereby begin to seek out particular kinds of food experiences and reject others.

A caveat: Korsmeyer notes that much of our experience of food has no particular aesthetic richness about it—eating, for example, is an everyday activity that we often do in everyday ways. While I understand and accept that pronouncement to some degree—surely we could not withstand three or more profound aesthetic experiences a day every day of our lives, could we?—I think there is substantial room to expand and deepen the quality of my aesthetic attention to food, even everyday food. While three profound experiences might exhaust us, surely we could substantially increase our daily aesthetic intake without doing grave harm to ourselves, couldn't we?

For the time being, I am going to limit myself to examining the possibility of developing the capacity for aesthetic *pleasure*, because this is the focus of Wendell

Berry's essay "The Pleasures of Eating," upon which I will draw here. [36] I recognize that pleasure is only one among many forms of aesthetic apprehension—and in some ways the easiest one to deal with. In making this choice, I do not mean to deny the possibility that foods could be aesthetically challenging or disturbing—to suggest that they could not be the source of poignant, concentrated insight of the sort Korsmeyer is describing, and would not be valuable because of that. (And in fact, I think it is a problem that Berry only talks about aesthetic pleasure.)

A. According to Berry eating ought to be an *extensive* pleasure. Berry is useful because, among other reasons, he can move the discussion from description to prescription. Berry wants to tell us what to do. In the current food system, which Berry describes as an "industrial food system," eaters are defined as "consumers", and the pleasure (by which he means aesthetic pleasure) we are urged to take in our food is a very thin pleasure indeed. Berry writes, "'Life is not very interesting,' we seem to have decided. 'Let its satisfactions be minimal, perfunctory, and fast.' We hurry through our meals to go to work and hurry through our work in order to 'recreate' ourselves in the evenings and on weekends and vacations."[37]

In contrast, Berry urges us to see eating as a complex relationship with soil, plant and animal—in short, an "agricultural act."[38] When we do so, we come to take great "*dis*pleasures in knowing about a food economy that degrades and abuses those arts and those plants and animals and the soil from which they come."[39] Seen from the perspective of an agricultural eater, industrial eating stops being very pleasurable at all. For, the agricultural eater cannot utilize the thin conception of pleasure engendered by the industrial view—a conception on which food satisfies so long as it looks like the box, tastes salty enough, and doesn't take long to prepare. The

agricultural eater understands that eating is—or should be able to be—an extensive pleasure. Here is Berry's first pass at an explanation of extensive pleasure;

> People who know the garden in which their vegetables have grown and know that the garden is healthy will remember the beauty of the growing plants, perhaps in the dewy first light of morning when gardens are at their best. Such a memory involves itself with the food and is one of the pleasures of eating. The knowledge of the good health of the garden relieves and frees and comforts the eater. .. A significant part of the pleasure of eating is in one's accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which food comes.[40]

This is a wonderfully evocative passage; its imagery has inspired me considerably over the years. Understood from the perspective of a fully fleshed out aesthetic theory like Korsmeyer's, however, Berry's notion of an extensive pleasure is pretty bare bones. It is not entirely clear how he is using the word "aesthetic", for example. And because we don't know what he means by the aesthetic, it is also not entirely clear (compelling illustrations notwithstanding) why anyone should be persuaded to call the pleasure of eating vegetables from his own garden an aesthetic pleasure rather than, say, a purely moral pleasure, an ecological pleasure, or even an economical pleasure. While Berry powerfully suggests (to me, the converted) that there exists a class of food experiences in which aesthetic pleasure cannot be divorced from ethical satisfaction, the prescriptive power of those suggestions needs some unpacking. Korsmeyer's aesthetic account is ideal for this task.

B. So, where to begin to fill out Berry's account?

1. I start by observing that Berry implicitly understands what Korsmeyer makes explicit: eating is a communal, an intimate act. I see the negative side of its communality in his observation that "we cannot be free if our food and its sources are

controlled by someone else"—which is how he would describe the current industrial food system, in which a very few corporations hold enormous control over the foods that eventually make their way into our supermarkets.[41] Berry understands communality to include not just other persons, but also the very animals and plants that we eat; he wants to know that the "animal has [not] been made miserable in order to feed me" and that the fruits and vegetables he eats "have lived happily and healthily in good soil..."[42] "A significant part of the pleasure of eating," he writes, "is in one's accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which food comes."[43] As Korsmeyer might say it, that pleasure comes from reflecting—with gratitude, perhaps—upon those animals and plants that literally become one, which is perhaps the most intimate connection of all. I would add that such pleasure would be enhanced by knowing that those who prepared one's food did so uncoerced and safely, and were adequately compensated for their work.

2. A second important feature of Berry's account that Korsmeyer can explain is this: the aesthetic pleasure I take in a particular food can be diminished or increased as a result of my coming to know more about it—specifically, more about its representational, exemplificatory and expressive qualities. Berry invites this approach, I think, by his use of words like "knowledge" and "ignorance"; he suggests that an extensive pleasure requires us *not* to be ignorant in certain ways. And if we require ignorance of certain sorts in order to experience pleasure, then that counts as evidence that our pleasure is of a considerably thinner sort. Developing the capacity to experience extensive pleasure does likely mean reducing the number of aesthetically pleasurable experiences that one will have involving food (which gives rise to the inevitable question of why anyone would be willing to do so—why give up blissful ignorance?). But it may also have the longer term effect of bringing me to seek out,

make possible, foster, and demand that the foods I eat be prepared—from ground to table—in ways that can give me extensive pleasure. Done in concert with many others, this could have a profound positive effect on the food system, and all those who work within it.

C. So, what do we do? We cultivate our capacity for experiencing extensive pleasure.

One way to do so is obviously to increase our attention to, and understanding of, the number and variety of symbolic layers on which we experience any given food. In his own list of suggestions, Wendell Berry urges us to *learn* a great variety of things: the origins of our food, the economy of industrial food production, the best farming practices, the life histories of food—and to make food choices on the basis of that knowledge.[44] In Korsmeyer's language, we might rewrite Berry's urgings as suggestions to attend to the exemplificatory and expressive qualities of foods, to render explicit the implicit meanings of our foods by situating them in the contexts (both environmental and social) in which they were grown, the ways in which they were grown, and the contexts (environmental and social) in which they were prepared—and then making food choices on the basis of those meanings.

Through coming to learn about best farming practices, for example, we might learn to see particular foods as *exemplifying* not only particular times of the day (cereal in the morning), but also specific times of the year, and specific regions of the globe. If I, a Minnesotan, start to understand strawberries as exemplifying late June (as they would, for any Minnesotan rooted in an agricultural, rather than an industrial, understanding of eating), I experience considerably less aesthetic pleasure from those big, bright red strawberries I find in the produce sections of my markets in January. Rather than exemplifying a particular time (of the day or the year), these industrial

strawberries seem to exemplify a desire to get outside of time, to make time irrelevant, to trick it. Once I start paying attention to their *apparent* timelessness, I might be led to inquire into the farming practices that are used to create that appearance. Will the berries also come to *express* unjust working conditions for farm workers, petrochemical intensive agricultural techniques, and the exhaust fumes of thousands of highway miles?

Furthermore, these berries' failure to exemplify many of the sensory qualities I think of as characteristic of a strawberry—juiciness, for example—also might lead me to explore the reasons that supermarket strawberries have become woody, flavorless lumps. Contemplating my bowl of berries as having been bred to travel, ripen at a time convenient for mass picking, and look uniform thus further diminishes my aesthetic pleasure in them. The superficial pleasure I feel upon seeing something fresh and red in my January grocery stores might turn to deep displeasure, even revulsion, as I attend to the layers of exemplification and expression in which they are embedded.

In making these suggestions, I hope I am operating in the spirit of Korsmeyer's project. At the same time, I know that I am pushing her theory in at least two ways. First, by suggesting that foods have implicit meanings because of their situation in agricultural cycles, I push beyond her claim that foods exemplify because of their place in the framework of meals. I think there is justification for this, but at the same time I am aware that I may have pushed the notion further than she would countenance. After all, in all her examples of exemplification—from the crispiness of apples to the breakfastiness of oatmeal—there is the definite sense that one can literally *taste* the property of the food in question. (Yes, we quite literally *taste* how wrong caviar is in the morning, if we are raised in cereal land.) In the case of strawberries in January, we might be able to cultivate that same feeling of inaptness of

taste. But I'm not sure that I could guarantee that, in all cases of inaptness, one would be drawn to attend to the exemplified property by taste—or by any sensory experience at all, for that matter. And if it becomes a *purely* cognitive matter—purely a case of something I know to be the case about a given food, then have I stretched the notion of exemplification to its breaking point? (If it is true that rBHG milk tastes exactly like milk produced by cows not taking rBGH, can we still make an aesthetic argument about the experience of drinking that milk? I think it is exactly this sort of appeal that opponents of rBGH often use to urge people not to buy it. "Imagine the cow as you drink the milk." But doesn't there need to be some (sensible) quality manifested in the milk in order to say that this milk expresses certain properties?)

To make this matter more three dimensional, consider this story, which I was told some time ago by the German filmmaker Helma Sanders Brahms, when she visited my college. It is a familiar enough kind of story; you no doubt have a version of your own. Brahms told me that, when she gave birth to her daughter 23 years ago, Werner Herzog came to visit her and brought her, among other things, a sausage, which he claimed came from very special animals raised naturally and freely in the pure mountain countryside of Moldavia. Brahms ate the first half of the sausage with relish, marveling at the deliciousness of the meat, the delicacy of the flavors, etc. Then, when she got to the center, she removed the band around the sausage, and underneath it, she found the words "made in Munich for" and the name of a cheap German market chain. The second half of the sausage, she reported, had no savor.

The second way in which I am extending Korsmeyer is by suggesting that we ought to cultivate a particular kind of context—an agricultural context—and reject another kind—an industrial one. While Korsmeyer of course insists that the meaning of food is embedded in context, she does not anywhere suggest that one ought to

change the context in which one understands food to be embedded. This is a level of prescriptiveness with which she might indeed be uncomfortable. For in suggesting that one change the context, I am of course suggesting that one try to replace one set of meanings with another.

Consider: unlike "jet lagged" strawberries, a raspberry pie from the berries in my parents' yard vibrantly exemplifies the qualities of raspberries—their jewel-like color and tangy flavor. It also expresses—or metaphorically exemplifies—the love of my mother and my father, because eating that pie conjures up images of them tending the raspberry canes in their yard every spring, summer and fall, picking the ripe berries, freezing them in their coffin-sized freezer, and then bringing them to me when they come to visit. (Raspberry pie, not chicken soup, spells parental love in our family.)[45]

Both kinds of experiences can come to have a multilayered character that, at least in principle, enables some degree of the "insight and emotional depth" that give aesthetic experiences their weight and value.[46] But in the case of the strawberries, an exploration of the layers leads me to an aesthetic experience that I would describe as deeply poignant, bordering on tragic—in marked contrast to its pleasant surface appearance. In the case of the raspberries, my exploration of the layers has (so far) only served to enhance and heighten that pleasure (which is not to say that it would necessarily remain so, no matter what I learned).

As I noted earlier, Korsmeyer suggests that not all eating has much cognitive—or, therefore much aesthetic—significance. However, I think that is to some extent a contingent, rather than a necessary, fact. While I don't mean to suggest that every meal can have the rich significance of a Seder, Christian communion or a Hmong New Year meal, I do believe that many of our ordinary eating experiences are

rich in implicit meanings that could be made explicit, thereby enriching the aesthetic significance of those experiences. Why do we tend not to do so? No doubt for many reasons—but surely one of them is that, in the industrial food system so many of us inhabit, making those meanings explicit will almost guarantee that our eating experience is less pleasant, not more so.

So why *wouldn't* we continue to be satisfied with thin pleasure, if the alternative, at least in the short term, is extensive *dis*pleasure? One reason surely is that even that thin pleasure is a very fragile thing, susceptible to being upset if our consciousness is permeated by an unpleasant or inconvenient feature of the food we eat. Such unpleasantnesses might include seeing a chicken truck drive by, getting lost in southern Wisconsin and coming upon a migrant worker camp, reading a statistic about the average distance traveled by one's food. It takes some work to ignore these facts—and over time, it may become more work than paying attention to them. Eventually, it may even require more work than does doing something to change one's participation in this industrial system.

Another reason is simply that thin pleasure is just that—thin. And if we have the capacity for aesthetic depth, and if aesthetically rich experiences do, as Korsmeyer suggests, "deliver" a "truth or realization or discovery...in a way that touches one intimately, that focuses and concentrates insight with poignant immediacy," then it might well behoove us to take advantage of the opportunities for aesthetically rich experiences where we find them. [47] In other words, multilayered aesthetic *dis*pleasure (to use a flat, inadequate word) might actually be far preferable to thin *pleasure.* (Note that, on Korsmeyer and Berry's accounts, even the gourmet may have only a relatively thin aesthetic experience of a food, if all they concentrate on are its

sensuous properties. Perhaps Kimball, with his emphasis on "taste and technique" would be similarly impoverished.)

In her discussion of why food is not an art form, even though it is aesthetically rich, Korsmeyer notes that the history of food and the history of art are fundamentally different. "On its own, food is assessed only for a relatively narrow band of exemplified properties; art is assessed for all symbolic function."[48] In effect, what I am calling for is for food to be accorded the same treatment—not so that it can become an art form, but so that our aesthetic appreciation of it can attain whatever depth of which it is capable.

V.

The summer I wrote this chapter, I was living in a boathouse on the Maine coast that has become my summer home. In my search for recreational reading that might speak to the place I was living, I came upon a memoir by Alix Kates Shulman describing several summers she spent alone on an island in Penobscot Bay, Maine.[49] Imagine my surprise when, instead of finding myself escaping from my work, I found a vivid example of someone cultivating the kind of capacity for aesthetic apprehension of food I've been advocating.

After her first (long, tedious and ultimately disappointing) trip to the island grocery store, Shulman decides to make use of the copy of Euell Gibbons that she finds on her cabin shelf, and teach herself how to eat of the things living around her. What began as a means of saving time and avoiding expensive, limp produce eventually becomes a passionate commitment to eating with the intimate understanding that her life and health are directly intertwined with the life and health of every living thing she encounters. The list of foods she eventually harvests (all in a ten minute walk from her door) spans a full page. And she doesn't stop at Maine; she

learns to eat what's growing in the mountains of Colorado, between the cracks of a Cleveland sidewalk and in the backyards of Santa Fe.

Her descriptions of eating captivate me, because, although she is deeply motivated by a set of ethical, environmental and political concerns, hers are so clearly not the descriptions of food eaten by someone operating out of some Kantian moral imperative—eating devoid of pleasure, so one can be sure one is *really* motivated by duty. Quite the reverse; her meals are luscious, extravagant feasts, filled with unbelievable delicacies, cooked into dishes she creates through a wonderful process that employs equal parts daring, experimentation and creativity. Her city friends, meanwhile, worry about her; isn't she starving to death? How can she possibly be getting by without anything to eat? A French friend writes to ask if she isn't "longing by now for a boeuf en daube or a galantine de volaille?" She and her visiting friend laugh, she writes, "As we stuff ourselves with bouillabaisse."[50]) Hers is not the subsistence of an environmental martyr; it is the repast of a gourmet, an *extensive* gourmet.

I close with a passage from Shulman's work, a description of a meal she and her friend create and enjoy together one late summer day.

> We browse through my cookbooks, perusing recipes, not as formulas or prescriptions but as hints and inspirations for impromptu inventions. Then we assemble our ingredients, take up our instruments--our knives, mixing bowls, measures—and begin. We slice green apples from my tree, scrub mussels and crabs, extract periwinkles from their shells. Margaret mixes dough and rolls out the pie shell; I measure the rice and season the mussel broth with juniper, bayberry, Irish moss, and a dash of wine. Then we build our salad, sampling each wild thing as we add it to the big wooden bowl. On top of the greens I

sprinkle some of the goosefoot "strawberries" and a fistful of yellow charlock blossoms, bright and mustardy. Presentation counts. ...

We set the table on the front deck facing the empty beach. Margaret pours the wine, I bring out the steaming paella, dense with mussels and periwinkles, dotted with red crabs and tiny peas. On the floor I place a pot for the empty shells, which we'll return to the sea. Our gorgeous salad shines in the wooden bowl, with its array of red, yellow and vari-colored greens. ... From our steaming plates rise invisible vapors, wafting delicious aromas to our nostrils, and I feel like a birthday child wishing on candles. We wish. Then we click our glasses, pick up our forks, and fall to.[51]

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[1] "Vegetarian Cooking for Carnivores," *Cook's Illustrated* (May/June, 2000): 31. The title evokes the image of recipes for use by lions and bears (animals that *really* consume only flesh) rather than by omnivorous humans like Kimball, Katzen and Madison. While the matter of vegetarianism is of only tangential relevance to this paper, I would note that this title is a good example of a not-uncommon occurrence—the non-vegetarian who comes to vegetarianism with a chip already on his shoulder. Vegetarians often notice that the very food on our plate may get interpreted by others as a silent reproach, a tacit moral attack on them for their choice to eat meat. Some non-vegetarian sometimes chooses to respond to vegetarians' perceived attack by drawing special attention to their meat eating, giving it more prominence than perhaps it does in their actual diet. Thus the name "carnivores" for people who in fact eat far more than just meat.

[2] Kimball, 31.

[3] Peg O'Connor notes that there is something disturbing about Kimball's reference to L.L. Bean—the quintessential emblem of one kind of American middle class correctness—when one considers that vegetarianism was often associated with hippies, and hippies were often dropouts from the middle class. Kimball seems, then, indirectly to rejoice in bringing these dropouts back into the middle class fold, and watching as they trade their VW microbuses for Subaru Outback station wagons.

[4] For a fascinating history of vegetarian food in the United States from 1966 to 1988, see Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[5] While I rarely find it helpful to reduce natural language expressions to formal logical ones, in this case I think it might be useful. While Kimball argues that $(x)(Ax \rightarrow -Mx)$ or even, more strongly, $(x)(Ax \equiv -Mx)$, I am arguing that $(x)(Ax \rightarrow Mx)$. (A and M here stand for something like "is aesthetically valuable" and "is morally praiseworthy.") I'm not arguing for a biconditional, because I don't want to say that all morally relevant experiences are automatically aesthetically relevant. In the end, logic can't quite capture the connection I'm talking about, because it cannot show the causal connection that I am most interested in positing—the causal relationship between aesthetic and moral significance.

[6] In the time since I originally wrote this paper, there has been a remarkable sea change in the United States regarding local food. Now, the prejudice sometimes seems to be "local food=delicious food. Imported food=aesthetically inferior food." Regardless of the shift in elite consumer preferences; my point remains; aesthetic commitments are regarded as standing across a deep divide from ethical or political ones. Indeed, the defensive retorts made by aesthetes worried that their choice of locally grown produce

might be mistaken for a political act (“the local ones just *taste* so much better”), illustrate that point.

[7] Carolyn Korsmeyer notes that what she calls the “strict view” of aesthetic attention is fading from fashion. See *Making Sense of Taste* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000): 106.

[8] See, especially, Chapter 4.

[9] Korsmeyer, 104-14.

[10] Korsmeyer, 142.

[11] Korsmeyer, 143.

[12] Korsmeyer, 141, 143.

[13] Appealing again to logic, I want to argue that (x) (Ax $\rightarrow$ Mx), where there is understood to be a *causal* connection between M and A. I’m not saying (x) (Ax · Mx), or (x) (Ax ≡ Mx). But I am saying that there is a relationship of necessity here—that moral considerations sometimes figure necessarily into the depth and significance of an aesthetic experience.

[14] Korsmeyer, 99.

[15] Korsmeyer, 115.

[16] Korsmeyer, 118.

[17] Korsmeyer, 118.

[18] Korsmeyer, 119.

[19] Korsmeyer, 119.

[20] Korsmeyer, 127.

[21] Indeed, as she notes, one needn’t employ a cognitivist analysis of food to understand the flavor properties of food as aesthetically significant.

[22] Korsmeyer, 129.

[23] A notion she borrows from anthropologist Mary Douglas. See Korsmeyer, 129-131.

[24] Korsmeyer, 131-32.

[25] See www.bittermelon.org.

[26] Korsmeyer, 134.

[27] Korsmeyer, 117.

[28] Korsmeyer, 132.

[29] Nichomachean Ethics, Chapter 3. http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/ari/nico/nico084.htm

[30] Korsmeyer, 193.

[31] Korsmeyer, 101.

[32] Korsmeyer, 145.

[33] Korsmeyer, 216.

[34] I should note here that Korsmeyer herself expresses skepticism at the thought that a philosophical theory can make something come to be the case—that a philosophical argument that food is art, for example, will actually make food be art—but I presume she won't object if I pronounce myself persuaded by her theory and choose to alter my own behavior on the basis of it.

[35] Korsmeyer, 134.

[36] In *What Are People For?* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

[37] Berry, 375.

[38] Berry, 377.

[39] Berry, 378.

[40] Berry, 378.

[41] Berry, 375.

[42] Berry, 378.

[43] Berry, 378.

[44] Berry, 377.

[45] Indeed, as I offer the final edits to this chapter, the story has acquired additional resonance, since my father died this fall, and I have eaten the last of his raspberries.

[46] Korsmeyer, 117.

[47] Korsmeyer, 134.

[48] Korsmeyer, 143.

[49] *Drinking the Rain* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

[50] Shulman, 145.

[51] Shulman, 133-136.