Essay

How to Become a Terran. Return to Earth as Geo-Gastro-Politics

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Posted Date: 1 April 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints202404.0034.v1

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How to Become a Terran. Return to Earth as Geo-Gastro-Politics

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Abstract: This article argues that philosophy and its influential narrative should take and think "food" - the gastro-world - in order to radically renew itself and develop a gastrocentric view of the world and the future of humanity. It discusses first some of the basic ideas of a gastrocentric understanding of the world, second the adventure of becoming a Terran, and third the daily practice of what I will call "terra madre forming". It tells us this: If there is to be a future of human survival and well-being on Earth, if we are to achieve the goals of sustainable development, then we have a clear agenda for tomorrow with the re-humidification of the soil - madre terra - that nourishes us. What needs to be done is quite simple and down-to-earth: We, each of us, if possible, must participate in the regeneration of the earth. In conclusion, it is time for the Slow Food movement to blossom into a geo-gastro-activism. The future task of this organization is to make itself electable as a political party to support the much-needed transformation of humans into Terrans.

Keynote: gastroethics; gastrosophy; Slow Food movement; humification; the terrestrial party; everyday activism

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In recent years, a number of new, so-called applied or practical ethics have emerged, such as bioethics, climate ethics, and more recently, robot ethics and neuroethics. As you all know, what the world dramatically lacks is gastroethics (This paper was presented as a keynote lecture at the Founding Symposium of the International Society for Gastronomic Sciences and Studies at the Auditorium of the University of Turin on September 25, 2022). Cited in: Veronika Bond, Humus. The black gold of the earth, 2018). The vast majority of my colleagues in academic philosophy believe that "food" - and all that is related to it - is not a subject worthy of philosophical and scientific study. This ideological devaluation of food weighs heavily because it has a very long history, going back to the ancient origins of our given way of thinking. For millennia, philosophers - that is, those who significantly shape societal values, fundamental narratives, and the dominant worldview - have placed the human mind, cognitive thought, and spiritual transcendence - *logos* in Greek - at the center of being human, while our bodies, which need to be fed, impose an animality on us: All animals eat, but bound to this animality (of feeding), none of them has acquired such a big brain and magical thinking as humans.

Well, it's time to reverse this logocentric self-understanding. I think that philosophy and its influential narrative should take and think "food" - the gastro-world - in order to radically renew itself and develop a gastro-centric view of the world and the future of humanity. In answering the important question of what philosophy is, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari describe the task of truly turning philosophy from head to toe as a necessary "reterritorialization" of human being and thinking (Deleuze/Guattari 1996). For there is nothing that connects us humans more physically, economically, culturally, and philosophically to the earth, to terra, than our daily "food".

Before I discuss some of the basic ideas of a gastrocentric understanding of the world, secondly the adventure of becoming a Terran, and thirdly the daily practice of what I will call "terra madre forming", I would like to take this opportunity for a very brief introduction to such a new gastro-philosophy, or, as we could call it, gastro-ethics or simply gastrosophy (Lemke 2016). With the modern bourgeois society at the beginning of the 19th century, we see the formation of a new gastronomy, resulting from the emergence of commercial restaurants and the culinary craftsmanship of professional chefs, as well as the emergence of modern nutritional science, scientific physiology

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and agrochemistry. At the same time, a tender offspring of gastrosophical thinking is stirring. Well-known names such as the Frenchman Brillat-Saverin, the first modern gastrocritic, the German art theorist Friedrich Rumohr, and above all, of course, free-thinking thinkers such as Ludwig Feuerbach and Friedrich Nietzsche begin to address the social importance and philosophical relevance of our food. However, it was the utopian Charles Fourier who first broadened the common concept of gastronomy with the new term "gastrosophy" to mean a philosophical-holistic view of all the components of the complex world of food, instead of referring only to a specific part of the whole. (Fleurot, 2017) Fourier himself did not develop a multidisciplinary and transformative gastrosophy, but the plausibility of his basic conceptual addition is easy to understand - and perhaps a useful inspiration in the context of the founding of our new society. (Levi 2017)

Let me briefly introduce two important components and forces of gastrosophical world-making or "worlding". - I borrow the term worlding from the "SF" philosopher (science fiction, speculative fabulation, etc., perhaps even slow food) Donna Haraway. (Haraway 2016) With this formulation, she offers another conceptual innovation that confronts the much-discussed "Anthropocene" with what she calls "Chtulucene" for good living and dying in a better world to come.

If we are looking for social forces that have the potential to transform many of the problems and critical realities of our society, these transformative forces can be found in our daily gastroethical choices. There is little else in human life that is as large, mathematically and morally, as the daily food choices we all make. Each one of us determines this world-moving force by the permanent choices that cannot be delegated. We are all equally responsible for this disruptive and slowly evolving power. Accordingly, gastrosophy turns the gastropolitical problem of "how to feed the world" into the daily and down-to-earth question of answerable gastroethics: "What will I eat tomorrow? What humanity am I feeding?" Gastroethics, which I see as a kind of slow food transforming, is the first principle of gastrosophical worlding.

The second component already connects to the crucial dimension of the "gastrocene". To this end, we should use the Internet of Food as wisely as possible in order to tell a utopian story that will really excite the masses. For in addition to powerful counterforces such as inhumane pandemics or dehumanizing wars of aggression, the humanistic "goals of sustainable development" and "a good life in dignity" for all are being challenged by a particularly powerful tendency. I am thinking here of the trans-post-human dystopia of abandoning the planet we have run down and leaving the dying Earth and its destructive humanity to its evolutionary fate... This popular "muskism" offers fantastic storytelling: "Let's create a space society and a multiplanetary species, building a new Earth on distant planets and exciting worlds yet to be discovered!“ (Musk 2016)

I call this utopological situation the titanic challenge of inventing and telling a visionary story of super-panhuman survival and well-being (and dying) on Earth. It supports the counter-narrative of a gastronautic *society*, an alternative becoming-with and a down-to-earth convivialism that has daily good food, culinary arts and creativity, communal eating, frequent feasting, humus composting, and so on at its normative and narrative center. Again with a nod to Haraway's SF philosophy, but more importantly to the foundation of our new society, my intention is to sow this gastrosophical worlding in your brains as fertile soil, like "a sack full of seeds for terraforming with terrestrial others“ (Haraway).

We are becoming increasingly disconnected from terra, the earth - a disconnection that threatens human survival on the planet and that is being exacerbated by soilless crop production and controlled high-tech environmental agriculture. Yet most of what we eat grows on fertile soil. Once you start thinking about this basic fact, it is not difficult to understand the importance of the earth's fertility. In sandy soils, nothing can grow, there would be no food, and ultimately no life on earth. Grass clippings, leaf compost, wood chips, decaying sawdust, yard waste, peat moss, or any other type of organic material serve as tasty food for plants. But in fact, what we eat is eating itself. In the end, we eat what they have eaten. What are they eating? We should ask ourselves gastrosophically. Humus in soil or compost plays an important role by retaining moisture, loosening heavy, sandy or sticky soils, adding body to light soils, helping to improve drainage and aeration, encouraging the proliferation and growth of soil organisms, and helping to make nutrient components available to plants. It keeps the soil rich. Without the humic richness of good soils, there would be no planet Earth and no good food for people to live on.

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The result of the slow rotting of organic matter - the eating and digesting of plants, we might say - fertile soil is the dark brown, crumbly, loose composition of invisible underground societies and symbioses that provide plants with all the nutrients they need to grow and flourish. These nutrients are in every potato, loaf of bread, grain of rice, or any other food we consume. The vital and nutritious soil that serves humans as the fundamental resource for their agricultural food production is commonly referred to as „earth“. In my understanding, fertile earth is synonymous with mother earth, topsoil, Muttererde, terriccio, or madre terra.

It may seem surprising, but the earth is the essence from which our planet takes its name. This is the case even though most of the planet Earth - or Mother Earth, Madre Terra, Pacha Mama, Mother Earth, Mutter Erde - is not vital and fertile earth, but rock and sand, or more and more roads, buildings and parking lots. (Mother Earth is also not a good, caring mother, because her children - we - often experience little good from her nature, and yet it is the earth that nourishes us, or in this sense, mothers us.). The earth on which we depend for the world's food supply is provided by less than 10% of the planetary territories and farmlands. Humic earth, which is the most essential for all terrestrial life on Earth, is literally a terra incognito for most of us - an unknown, never thought of, new world. The origin of almost all living beings, including you and me, is the thin, dirty skin of the Earth's surface, only 12-14 inches deep beneath our feet. For hundreds of thousands of years, our species has lived off the unconditional gift of humic soils. This is especially true since the invention of human cultivation of "land" - since most of our daily food comes from (traditional) agricultural terraforming. But as a ready-made fossil food resource, terra madre has evolved - literally as slow food - over millions of years from the sustainable cycle of life and death of all non-human earthlings. We must understand that the natural formation of just one centimeter of terra madre can take centuries.

And we should remind ourselves of the tragic fact that, since the beginning of anthropogenic terraforming, traditional agricultural food production has always been nothing more than systematic exploitation, a one-sided taking and extracting of the fruits of the earth without giving anything nourishing back to the earth. Such a one-sided, unsustainable consumption of fossil resources will continue until the available arable land is exhausted, or at least until crop yields gradually decrease due to declining soil fertility. In the more recent past of our history, such signs take us back to the beginning of the 19th century. At that time, the British population theorist Thomas Malthus predicted an impending food shortage and mass famine.

Instead of revolutionary hunger riots, however, we saw the so-called Green Revolution: The invention of modern agrochemistry and the industrialization of agriculture. In particular, the invention of synthetic fertilizers and the mechanization of farming have made it possible to increase global crop yields many times over and to produce cheap food in abundance. For almost 200 years, the food supply that feeds a rapidly growing world population - four times as many people as in Malthus' time - has come less and less from the earth and more and more from the international fertilizer industry, which relies on fossil oil rather than fertile soil. Artificial fertilizers really work like fast food for farm crops: They make them fast full and fat, but at the same time all the other inhabitants of terra madre get nothing to eat. They gradually starve, and the earth dies. In fact, much of the Earth is now in crisis - degraded and eroding. Instead of increasing the average thickness of fertile topsoil, the dominant agribusiness and the use of fast-food fertilizers and aggressive tillage techniques - and as the plow breaks up the earth, carbon is released into the atmosphere - are degrading the ground on which we live. We have taken the earth for granted, and now one-third of the world's arable land is depleted. The equivalent of 30 football fields of soil are lost to extinction every minute. All responsible scientists and UN agencies clearly say that we have less than a hundred harvests left on the planet if we continue business as usual. This means that at the current rate of extinction, 95% of the Earth's arable land could become desert within our children's lifetimes. Dead soil becomes the largest carbon emitter, accelerating global warming to catastrophic levels.

It is sad to see how humans are doing all the foolish things they can to turn their unique and only spacecraft into an uninhabitable dead wreck. As one of many similar documents from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states: „The main problem humanity is currently facing is not global warming, extinction of species or any other environmental crisis – the main problem we will have to face is the degradation of our soils. The world population continues to increase while we destroy more and more topsoil. If this is allowed to continue there won’t be enough

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fertile soil left to feed a growing world population.“ (Cited in: Veronika Bond, Humus. The black gold of the earth, 2018).

Let me comment on this official statement for a few moments. We need to understand that the degradation of fertile soil and the continued destruction of the earth is turning out to be the main problem of humanity, in part because modern capitalist agriculture is one of the main causes of global warming and the extinction of biodiversity. The earth contains about 1,500 billion tons of organic carbon, that's about twice the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. When the earth is exposed to erosion, the planet exhales millions of tons of carbon every day, contributing significantly to global warming and its destructive effects. Similarly, few realize that terra madre is the largest ecosystem of all: It harbors a quarter of the biodiversity of the global ecology and should be appreciated as a symbol of the deep complexity of this fragile world.

A handful of nutrient-rich terra is a teeming playground for up to 10 billion microorganisms and as yet undiscovered species - that's more than the number of people living on the planet. It’s this microbial powerhouse and its complex diversity full with symbiotic societies which makes terra madre the greatest carbon sink we have, one of the best regulators of global climate, the largest natural water reservoir and a treasure trove of irreplaceable life forms. So our present is experiencing a second Malthusian moment: If the destruction of the earth continues as before, because the prevailing agriculture does not fundamentally change, in 25 years a humanity that has grown by another two billion people will have only half as much food as today. The food shortages and their dramatic consequences that are likely to occur in the near future are unimaginable; food riots and civil wars could erupt around the world as people suffer from famine. The current price hikes that each of us faces on a daily basis and the global shortages that Putin's war is imposing on a hungry world are a bitter foretaste of tomorrow's food.

To make matters worse, global yields cannot be increased simply by pumping more chemical fertilizers into dying soils. Quite apart from the fact that there is no longer an unlimited supply of new arable land. Suddenly, humanity is confronted with the fact that terra madre - the food-giving earth - is a scarce and extremely valuable resource on our globe. In the recent past, many people have associated genetic engineering in agriculture (as well as geoengineering in general) with the optimistic hope of providing needed yield increases (and sustainable change). However, it is not only genetically engineered foods that have encountered acceptance problems, but also the latest inventions of the high-tech agricultural industry, such as digitalized precision farming combined with big data monitoring systems or soilless food factories in circularly controlled plants, do not offer a universally practicable strategy for either a safe and affordable food supply for all or for shaping the terra madre that we humans urgently need to survive on this planet.

If there is to be a future of human survival and well-being on Earth, if we are to achieve the goals of sustainable development, then we have a clear agenda for the future with the rehumidification of the Earth. What needs to be done to regenerate the earth is quite simple and down-to-earth.

Most Slow Food Terra Madre farmers, and all organic farmers and all sustainable forms of permaculture, organic agriculture, and terra preta gardening, apply this down-to-earth philosophy. They not only take their food from the earth, they give good food back to the earth - organic fertilizers such as compost, manure, biomass, crop rotation, and cover crops. All of these serve as critical transformative agents for sustainable, low-input food production. What will do the most to regenerate the terra madre is to make friends with *earthworms*. Earthworms are true heroes of the soil. Their humorous earthing offers many benefits, from increased nutrient availability and better drainage to the creation of a crumbly terra. These heroes of the terra madre - we could think of replacing the Slow Food turtle with them - love areas where humans do not interfere with their underground activities and secret societies.

Of course, tillage and plowing are the most common agricultural practices, dating back to the origins of anthropogenic land use and farming. But there is nothing wrong with humans reterritorializing themselves as humus formers. The no-till philosophy helps reduce humus erosion and runoff, maintains earthworm habitat and humor, and retains the moisture and spirit of the earth. No-till cultivation techniques support changes in the chemical, physical, and biological properties of the subterranean world, store organic carbon, reduce or eliminate chemical inputs, promote cooperative biodiversity, and respect the subterranean kitchens and commons among more-than-human co-earthlings. In other and more technical words, geoengineering: Sustainable land

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management that is both economically feasible and ecologically sound, or, more poetically, a caring and compassionate, naturally intelligent and humanizing terra madre design, will be fundamental to our common terrestrial existence and our future food security. If humans participate in this ongoing grounding, the earth will become drought and flood resistant sponges, huge carbon sinks, and the cultivating terra will become cultivating communities and growing good societies that feed themselves without the need for synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, living off monocultures and deforming terra madre.

The good news is that by changing the way we farm and eat, we can help protect ans save our soils for generations to come. Healthy, well-managed earth capture carbon dioxide and store it as organic carbon. This makes is an essential resource for reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and combating climate change. The EU Soil Strategy for 2030 sets out a framework and concrete actions to protect and restore soils and ensure their sustainable use. It sets out a vision and targets to achieve healthy soils by 2050, with concrete actions by 2030. It also announced a new Soil Health Law by 2023 to ensure a level playing field and a high level of environmental and health protection. However, this legislation does not mention organic farming, humus and its fascinating carbon storage capacity, or everyday activities of all of us humans as humus-forming Terrans. But our focus should be on organic farming and „urban“ gardening,

Terrans preserve and shape Terra Madre by ensuring that their soil is always covered by plants, because Terra Madre does not like to be naked and exposed, it prefers to be covered and beautifully dressed; by adding and nourishing the soil with organic matter, manure, any agricultural cultivation should be designed to shade the land as much as possible with some kind of shade, grasses, herbs, bushes, trees; by reducing and eliminating chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which can have harmful effects on soil life and terrestrial biodiversity; by limiting damage from heavy machinery and overstocking of livestock; by increasing the variety of crops grown on your land; by building compost.

In contrast, modern intensive farming systems contribute to these problems. They exhaust natural resources focusing on short-term gains rather than the long-term sustainability that works best for the land, wildlife and local communities.

We need an alternative food system that is truly sustainable. The good news is that many of the solutions lie in agro-ecology, and nothing else.The most important part of being a Terran is caring for your earth - a good farmer has a deep, abiding relationship with it. This relationship binds you to the earth, compels you to be mindful of what you do on your land. We care about what happens in the soil. It's hard to have that relationship if you don't walk your land regularly and smell your soil to understand what it's telling you. You have to know the weeds and what they offer you and what they take from you. You have to put your hands in the ground and make that connection. As the fields get bigger, that is what falls away. When we ride around on tractors, crisscrossing vast tracts of land that produce only one or two crops and leave no room for living things, we cannot possibly understand what is going on beneath our feet.

To date, only one percent of the world's arable land is cultivated according to the rules of organic agriculture. But even if we imagine a scenario in which all of the world's farmers convert to terra madre formation and become organic farmers, this transformation would not be enough to regenerate the earth, and their global harvest would not be enough to provide good food for a rapidly growing world population. Even if the emerging "Save Our Soil" movements were able to raise the profile of their civil society protest and political activism many times over, demonstrative demands by NGOs and theoretical appeals to policymakers by committed scientists and intellectuals, important as they are, will not change anything. Even if politicians and governments finally take up the cause and enact the necessary laws and regulations, such as the United Nations' "Save Your Soil" campaign, the international "4 in 1000" initiative, or the European Union's recently adopted "Soil Strategy" and "Soil Health Act," it will not be enough. Although this new kind of geopolitics is also important.

What will save the Earth more than anything else is the transformation of as many humans as possible into Terrans - whether that means supporting the terra madre formers among us today, or allowing the compost-human Terran in all of us to counteract the prevailing earth-escaping tendencies. Allowing the rediscovery of the Terran in us and becoming terra madre formers in our daily lives, however, does not mean that everyone has to become full-time farmers all over again. We

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know the tragic history of a humanity, or peasantry, that has experienced the cultivation of the land only as hard work and an inhuman burden. The curse of the plow is the long shadow that has alienated our species from the earth and our earthly origins. One of the possible futures of a developling humanity might be to experiment with a down-to-earth lifestyle whose daily routine includes a few hours of agricultural work - our daily earthing - among other meaningful activities of a good life.

The first steps toward this near future are being taken in many places. All over the world, for example, a new generation of younger farmers is opting for part-time farming rather than continuing the traditional full-time business of their parents. Or in any number of school garden projects or Slow Food International's 10,000 Gardens in Africa initiative, or in the urban gardening collectives that are springing up like mushrooms everywhere, and in the countless food transition communities that are trying to approximate the utopian life of Terrans in the terracene. Certainly, planting 10,000 food gardens on an entire continent will not be enough. Only if millions and billions of terra madre forming activities on every corner in the cities, on every piece of land and suitable area in the countryside reterritorialize humans all over the world, will our world - finally - be transformed into a true paradise garden, where there could be a common survival and good food could grow for all earthlings. To connect with the earth and the earthly others, to slowly regenerate the vitality and fertility of the terra madre, its texture, its smell, is surely one of the most rewarding activities human beings are capable of.

Finally, I would like to refer to the „down to earth“ French philosopher Bruno Latour (Latour 2017). In his recently published "Terrestrial Manifesto“ (Latour 2018), Latour calls for the creation of a new „International Party of Terrans". Indeed, every now and then and currently very often the world witnesses the creation - and failure - of new political parties. I wonder who else could become a terrestrial party if not the Slow Food Movement as the best known global grassroots movement dedicated to the regeneration and celebration of Terra Madre. Perhaps it is time for the international Slow Food organization to blossom into a geo-gastro-political party after the first phase of worldwide expansion of its local convivia and communities, its national representations and its global network - supported by its scientific self-reflection. I think the future task of Slow Food activism is to make itself electable as a political party to support the much-needed transformation of people into Terrans. At the founding ceremony in Paris in 1987, the first Slow Food president and chief philosopher Carlo Petrini called for the creation of an "International of Good Taste". In remembrance of this Parisian origin of the movement and in appreciation of the pioneering French philosophy in gastrosophical matters, we should take advantage of the 200th anniversary of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *The Physiology of Taste: Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, to found the International Terrestrial Party of Good Taste, with the earthworm as its symbol.

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