

Foreword

The present book is the first of a series that will be brought out in coming years by transcript Verlag and which we have entitled “Aesthetic Practice”. The intention is not only to explore the epistemic potential of aesthetic practices in art, design and related fields, but also to dovetail aesthetic practices and the associated discourses that are otherwise carefully distinguished from one another as systemic units in society and often co-exist more or less in isolation. If in this regard we construe objects and processes as the embodiment of knowledge, and knowledge itself as an object and process, then in the volumes in this series we will address the question of how a concept of knowledge can be better consolidated and advanced beyond purely language-based concepts. We believe that it would be promising to return to and make productive use of the concept of critique as an act of differentiating, assessing and suspending final judgments, among others taking our cue from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. We wish hereby to develop the concept of critique dialogically as a critique of art, culture and taste. We proceed from the assumption that the discourse itself, be it in the form of lectures, dialogues, seminars, or performances constitutes aesthetic practice. Aesthetic practice can be fostered performatively along the interfaces and nodes of social systems, be it in the form of hybrid authorship or as an admixture of individuals, media and discourses. If only because it is suitable for bridging the hiatus of theory and practice.

For the current volume on the “Culinary Turn. Aesthetic Practice of Cookery” we have selected different genres of texts and images that cast a bright light on the social fields of cookery, food and nutrition – as discourses, treatises, recipes, confessions, assertions, conversations, and definitions of positions. If we have assembled the texts and images under the heading of a “culinary turn”, then it is not to claim that we seek to prove this or that theory or hypothesis. However, our intention is to bring together in a volume those text and image genres that would not normally be encountered in one and the same book because they originate in different discourses and practices. If one considers the topic of cookery as broadly as possible, then the discourses and practices relating to it seem so complex as to prevent them being boiled down to a single common denominator. The resulting heterogeneity is thus intentional or at least conceded.

The term “culinary turn” is chosen to express a broad social turn towards questions of food, of cooking and nutrition, one driven by a new proximity of cooking and eating to cultural techniques in art and design. A key indicator of the “culinary turn” is not only how cookery and food are spilling over into other walks of life, but also the related emergence of paradoxes. Thus, the “culinary turn” is formulated as genuineness and authenticity that functions as a counter program to a digitalized, connected and globalized world, although both qualities have first to be constructed and staged.¹ And where it lays claim to independence and a “more genuine genuineness”, its content still derives from the relationship to a community from which it distinguishes itself but which it needs to be able to develop authentically in the first place. The slightly overweight TV chef-lecturers have given way to athletic tattooed doers in their best years. However, the seedbed for the “culinary turn” are less the artists or cooks, and above all those who move across the system boundaries: the amateurs, hipsters, cultural scholars that publish their own cookbooks, creative hobby cooks, curators, and authors of culinary and rural magazines, not to mention their subscribers. Their flag is the curly kale.

The idea for the present volume arose in the context of the preparations for the research project, now supported by the Swiss National Fund, on “Cooking and Eating as Aesthetic Practice”. One of the triggers for the research project was the encounter with Swiss chef Stefan Wiesner. He had converted a barn in the rear courtyard of his inn, the *Rössli* in Escholzmatt/Entlebuch, into an experimental lab. Alongside a kitchen, the lab is choc-a-bloc with books, old and new tools, apocryphal spices, plant essences, aromas and countless woods, some of them several thousand years old. From here, Stefan Wiesner heads off into the countryside close at hand to discover ingredients for his thematic gourmet menus. The latest of these, called “Nature speaks”, is made up of 14 units: water, earth, fire, air, sun, brook, wood, flame, wind, Big Bang, metal, soil, stone, ash. The tenth course, the “Big Bang”, is composed as follows: “Salt crucible sounded at 108 Hz, covered with a Chioggia beet in pink pepper water, carrot mousse with rose-water, carrot greens jelly, black Palatinate beet chips, violet Palatinate beet straw, black salsify in caramel nutmeg milk, yellow beet with sweet-sour pimento, parsley root from the smoker with juniper, parsnip candied with walnut, celeriac with a crust of salted thyme, kohlrabi with coriander in wine vinegar, sunflower root with clementine leaves, oat root in laurel-cheese water, yam root parboiled, root of chervil in alcohol and Szechuan pepper 50 Hz”. Wiesner explains the history behind each course with great precision and explains the thinking behind them.

Well before the triumphant march of Nordic cuisine, in fact for over 25 years, Stefan Wiesner has been exploring the various substances in the world, in part as a counter to so-called molecular cuisine, in order to transform them in culinary terms. When we first spoke with him, at the end of 2013, Wiesner commented: “If a chef learned under me then he

1 | See Menke: 1996, pp. 198-201 on authenticity.

must be able to analyze an Art Deco clock such that he can derive a recipe from it." The typography of the clock face, the materiality of the casing and clockwork, the stylistic and social conditions of the epoch when the clock was made all lead to certain recipe ideas as regards the choice of components and cooking technique that Wiesner then develops through sketches. Put differently: The clock gets cooked, in part directly using components such as gold or leather. Stefan Wiesner is therefore not bragging when he says: "I can actually serve a dish on any topic. You simply have to state the topic." What we can see here is a specific interpretation of cooking as a symbiosis of art, craftsmanship and experience in which the focus is not only on cooking tasty dishes, but on using cooking as a way to analyze the world and transform it into a gustatory experience. In this way, and in part for the very first time, things get grasped in culinary terms. Understood in this light, cooking constitutes an aesthetic practice that seeks a dialogue with other artistic practices, with nature and with our stocks of knowledge of the world. While the path taken by artistic Modernism can obviously be read as a path from figuration to abstraction, the path of a history of cooking probably runs the other way: It starts with pure material, as it were with the abstraction of essences, and from there increasingly moves towards the figurative and to representational concepts. This explains why an entire carrot or meat on a bone has become more important than mash, tartar, pie dough and free aromas: On a plate prepared by Stefan Wiesner landscapes, objects and abstract entities are raised to the level of culinary representation. Those who sit down to a Stefan Wiesner gourmet menu may well be profoundly touched by tastes that they have never experienced before or that reach back into the depths of childhood and in a strange way interlink the past and future in the present. At this level cooking can clearly be understood as a speculative practice which, unlike its most recent equivalent, the "speculative turn", is able to reach practical conclusions from the precedence of the world over human thought.

The present volume is subdivided into five chapters or episodes: *kitchen*, *production*, *concept*, *discourse* and *perception*. The *kitchen* chapter (Krausse/Leinfelder/von Mende, Regan, Rützler/Reiter, Surmann, Wiesner) brings together historical, political and social perspectives on the culinary theme. The conversation with Stefan Wiesner has been placed at the beginning, as it is key to the concept and thrust of this book. The *production* chapter (Bartha, de La Falaise, Flammer, Home/Oehen, Stromberg) contains fundamental angles on the agricultural, botanical and socio-economic preconditions of the current aspects of cuisine that focus on diversity and regionality. They also show how the latter two aspects have become cultural and social paradigms. The chapter *concept* gets its teeth into the conceptual richness of cooking and into the biographical-narrative dimensions of ingredients and aromas. Anneli Käsmayr picked constituents that make sense in terms of cooking practice (meats, vegetables, fats, acids, herbs and salt), to which Samuel Herzog responded with narrative frames. Then chefs and artists (Alhäuser, Clopath, de La Falaise, dilettantin produktionsbüro, Froelich, Frühsammer, Wiesner) were invited to respond to

the chosen constituents with drafts of recipes. In this episode, we sought above all to vividly emphasize the variance of culinary design practices as aesthetic practices while also visualizing the roots of the gustatory experience in biographically informed memories. The *discourse* chapter (Bonino, Bröcker, Knecht, Martinez, Vilgis, Wiesel) highlights the extension of cookery to other cultural domains. A key thrust of the *perception* chapter (Dollase, International Gastronomical Society, Studer, van der Meulen, Vilgis/Käsmayr, Waldenfels) is to foreground aspects of enjoyment and aesthetic perception as opposed to the customary social discourse framing of “health, sustainability and ethics”. Among other things, the stress will be placed on exploring phenomenological aspects of the gustatory and its close links to other levels of sensory experience. This volume is concluded by a full bibliography on the subject. We included all references of the contributions, which are of a general interest in view of the culinary turn topic. If a reference is short cited within the contributions, the reader will find the detailed title in the full biography at the end of the book.

The present volume sets out to try and highlight the differences in the approaches derived from theory and practice and thus also to treat the two as equally valid. Over and above the afore-mentioned chapters, a number of images are scattered through the book (Kobe Desramault, Lucky Peach). We want in this way not only to emphasize the key role that the iconic and the visual play in the current discourse on the “culinary turn” (e.g., the different publications on theme brought out by Phaidon Press or in magazines such as “Alla Carta” or in food blogs such as My New Roots, Julie’s Kitchen), but also take the perspective of aesthetic practice to offset the predominance of linguistic approaches to the subject.

Should this volume manage to reach readers in a broad variety of disciplines and areas of society and succeed in fostering dialogues across all dining tables, cuisines, museums, restaurants, desktops, libraries and digital networks, and if it moreover triggers debate, discourses and contradiction, then it will have achieved its objective.

Nicolaj van der Meulen/Jörg Wiesel, February 2017