The Recipe and Photography
The Sensual Appeal of Image-Word Relations in Cookbooks

Jens Ruchatz

Abstract *Before the advent of photography and its photomechanical reproduction recipes had only rarely been accompanied by pictures. However, from around 1900 the common imagery of food stuffs and kitchen utensils is supplemented by visualizations of cooked dishes as well as step-by-step photographs of food preparation. Whereas the recipe has been thoroughly studied as a pertinent text type or as an indicator of eating habits, its relation to pictures has received little scholarly attention. On a theoretical level this article will discuss, how the recipe can accommodate pictures, going beyond the hierarchized concept of 'illustration.' By looking at various examples across the history of cooking publications, dating from 1896 to the present, the evolution of the photographic recipe picture will be traced in order to elaborate, how in the course of this development the photographic recipe picture changes from an instructive image to a sensory evocation of a dish that is mainly designed to be pictorially indulged.*

1.   Creating Recipes Without Words?

The book's front cover is bright white, lacking text it is only adorned with a stylized graphic representation of a smiling mouth, with a red tongue licking the lips (fig. 1). The back cover is even more sparsely designed, only prompting the observer "Régalez vous," gift yourself, set in a sober font without serifs. In the same type, the spine hints at the books contents: "La cuisine sans bla bla" (Larousse 2018), indicating verbally what the cover design suggests namely, a cookbook without a lot of words. The French publisher Larousse, somewhat acting as corporate author, is also given on the spine.[1] A brief preface of only four brief paragraphs, titled a "petit bla bla…," sets out the concept of the book: "Because our hectic lives don't allow us to waste time in the kitchen, we're bringing you 200 recipes to grasp in the blink of an eye!" (Larousse 2018: n.p. [my transl. here and subsequently]) The efficiency promised is based on a

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1   The design of the dust jacket repeats the cover, apart from the onomatopoia "miam…" which are added on both inner flaps. Moreover, it is stunning that the book even avoids pagination: Just the recipes are numbered and indexed.

photographic encoding of the recipes replacing the usual verbal instructions: "Do you want to cook but hate deciphering a recipe of 25 lines? [...] The formula is simple: follow the pictures, and you'll get the recipe. Welcome to the kitchen of simplicity!" (Larousse 2018: n.p.) These introductory remarks claim that what renders cooking complicated is not the process itself, but its verbal encoding in the form of the written recipe. It's pictorial substitution, chosen for *La cuisine sans bla bala*, promises to be more concrete, showing rather than telling and without recourse to culinary terminology that many users might not be familiar with. "Would you like to buy a parsnip but have no idea what it looks like?"

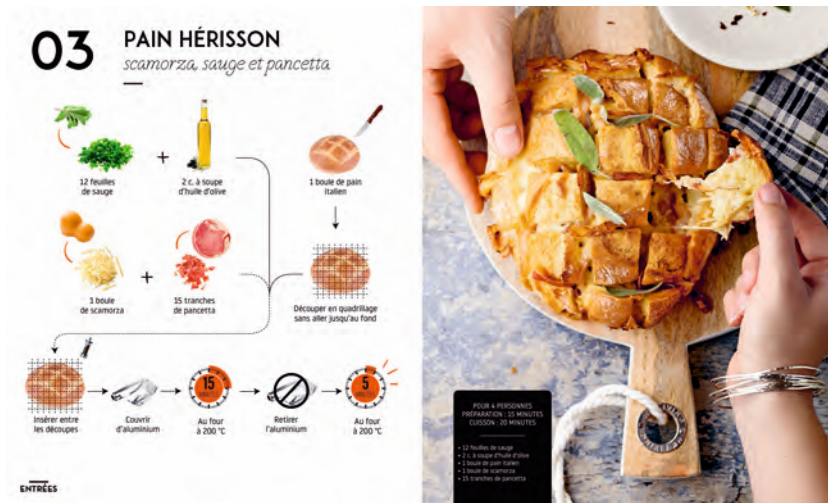*Fig. 1: Cover of* La cuisine sans bla bla. *Size: 20.8 × 24cm.*

Source: Larousse 2018.

As can be seen in the example of the double page devoted to *Pain hérisson*, the *Hedgehog Bread* (fig. 2), *La cuisine sans bla bla* uses small packshot photographs, drawn from several picture libraries, to represent all ingredients and most kitchen utensils. The promise to do away with "instructions" altogether is, however, misleading. "Here, you'll find just the essentials: add up the +'s and follow the arrows: as sure as 1+1 makes 2, these 200 recipes will work wonders!" (Larousse 2018: n.p.) Whereas showing food stuffs in photographs may make them easy to identify when shopping in a supermarket, the representation of cooking operations by pictures alone through plusses and arrows, etc., would easily result in confusion. Thus the picto-

rial coding is supplemented throughout by written information detailing what to do ("cover with aluminum"), giving quantities ("12 leaves of sage") and even captioning all of the packshots, identifying verbally what is visible – and indicating limited trust in the informational value of photographs by themselves (Larousse 2018: n.p.). The interaction of images and writing produces some overlaps and redundancies, as well as complementarities, which are needed to remedy both media's respective shortcomings, thereby ensuring the recipe's practicability.

Fig. 2: The recipe of Pain hérisson *in* La cuisine sans bla bla*: Double-page size: 38.4 × 23 cm.*

Source: Larousse 2018: n.p.

Even if the revolution, announced in the introduction, gets stuck halfway, *La cuisine sans bla bla* experiments successfully with a relevant change to the visual aspect of the cookbook. For each of its 200 recipes the book reserves a double page, with the recipe on the left and a full-page photo depicting the ready-made dish on the right. By covering the entire page, these food photos testify to the importance *La cuisine sans bla bla* grants to the picture. The photo depicts the bread's crispy brown crust, which is contrasted with the soft texture inside of the loaf, which is revealed by one torn out piece. The photograph does not only show what a cooked *Pain hérisson* could look like, but also adds some context, indicating where and on which occasions the dish could be consumed. The bread is arranged on a rough wooden board, signifying, with the checkered napkin on the right, a simple but authentic lifestyle. Two hands reaching into the space of the photograph from the outside, occupied with

breaking off pieces from the bread loaf, dynamize the pictorial time, as they refer to the process of eating which reaches even further into the future than the preparation of the meal. As the hands are positioned diagonally and made to look to belong to two different people, one of them coded as female by its display of bangles, the communal character of the meal is portrayed, suggesting that the loaf is positioned in the middle of a table with everybody sharing in. This kind of coding, which could be easily analyzed further, is common in food photography. A deviation from the standardized layout is, however, that the list of ingredients as well as the contextual information about cooking times and number of servings, which typically go on the instruction page, are situated inside the photograph. Yet, the indications are designed to harmonize with the picture by being inserted into a small black box on the margin of the page, so that they provide not only information, but also a visual accent. This layout which divides the typeface between the opposite pages, while at the same time reducing its overall surface, lays open the aim and selling point of *La cuisine sans bla bla*. It is not just about claiming more space for pictures, but about undermining the typical duality of the cookbook's double page with pictures on the one hand and text on the other. This is not only effected by increasing pictorial content and minimizing typeface, but also by distributing both on the oppositive pages. *Cuisine sans bla bla* manages to extend the primacy of the picture by realizing a continuous pictoriality as its main appeal. Despite the foreword, the pictorial encoding of the recipes seems less a functional choice than an aesthetic one that allows pictures to enter all pages and give the publication a distinctive look.[2]

Transferring written instructions into the realm of the pictorial may be not more than a noteworthy exception – and probably not even an efficient one for the swift imparting of the relevant information. In the context of this paper, this extreme case raises fundamental questions about the status of the photograph in relation to the recipe. How do food photographs contribute to recipes? Do photographs form part of the information or do they mainly perform a decorative function? To what extent do contemporary recipes rely on the inclusion of photographs? Or is it the other way round and the recipes are dominated by pictures which form the true attraction of

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2   The success of the book is difficult to judge as the sales haven't been reported by the publisher. It can serve as an indicator that Larousse issued a series of cookbooks, working with the established template and title: *La cuisine sans bla bla special kids*; *La bonne cuisine sans bla bla mijotée en France*, *Cocktails sans bla bla* etc. Besides, some of these books have been translated into German and Dutch. What is more, *La cuisine sans bla bla* is only one series among others, which likewise emphasize the structural simplicity of their recipes in their layouts, the most successful of which is *Simplissime*, created by Jean-François in 2015, available in French, English, Spanish, Dutch and German editions. The double page layout of the *Simplissime* books uses photos to make up the ingredient list, which – according to the basic premise of the series – never contains more than five items. Another prominent mode of visualizing the descriptive recipe text is using step-by-step photography.

current cookbook productions? Such considerations have driven the design of the cookbook at least since the nineteenth century, when it began to turn into a popular genre of non-fiction publication. How to best mediate dishes and their modes of preparation is not a recent challenge. Whereas recipes were originally collected to be read, the availability of comparatively inexpensive forms of illustration, which (since the introduction of wood engraving) could be inserted into the text, furthered layouts which presupposed the constant switching between reading and viewing, until in *La cuisine sans bla bla* and kindred attempts the latter has totally supplanted the former. The book's premise that imparting cooking knowledge verbally is inferior to doing so by pictures runs counter to the established cultural hierarchies. The new medial arrangement inside the cookbook puts a lot of effort into conveying culinary knowledge by addressing sensory perception instead of mediating the information through the abstract code of language. The role the photograph plays in the communication of cooking will be first discussed on a systematic level before I take a cursory look at a few stages of the history of the cookbook to show how the photograph came to be one of its essential elements.

2. Recipe Photograph Parameters

Recipes are texts which describe how to prepare specific dishes and are typically employed as instructions when cooking (Wolańska-Köller 2012: 93–104).[3] They also come into play at an earlier stage, preliminary to cooking: when choosing a dish to make, reflecting on how to prepare it (e.g. comparing different recipes of the 'same' dish) and shopping for necessary ingredients. Recipe texts may, however, perform various functions. Obviously, recipes can figure as memories, documenting culinary cultures or even works (Wolańska-Köller 2012: 95–97), without the need to be actually realized in the kitchen. Moving even further away from the practice of cooking, recipes are texts which may be read as a particular form of literature, playing on culinary imagination (Leonardi 1989; Humble 2020: 195–226; Crucifix 2016). In 1950 Elizabeth David's *Book of Mediterranean Food* introduced the British to a then exotic cuisine, giving recipes of dishes for which the necessary ingredients could be hardly obtained at the time. "But even if people could not very often make the dishes here described," David looks back five years later, "it was stimulating to think about them; to escape from the deadly boredom of queuing and the frustration of buying

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3   Derived from Latin and French origins around 1500 (and likewise 'receipt' as the older term [OED 2023a]) the term 'recipe' originally referred to a "formula for the composition or use of a medicine, a prescription" (OED 2023b), was then transferred to other fields of use and came to be typically associated with cooking in the 18th century. The analogue development can be observed for Italian and German (Liebman Parrinello 1996: 294).

the weekly rations; to read about real food cooked with wine and olive oil, eggs, butter and cream, and dishes richly flavoured with onions, garlic, herbs, and brightly coloured Southern vegetables" (1955 [1950]: 12; for the illustrations see Hunter 1991: 146–147; for the context see Humble 2005: 125–136). With this qualification in mind, it is important to remember that recipes do not reliably mirror what was cooked, "they will always have more to tell us about the fantasies and fears associated with foods than about what people actually had for dinner" (Humble 2005: 4). Of course, some styles of writing recipes lend themselves more than others to literary reception. The desire for maximum clarity and simplicity in descriptions has produced an at times highly formalized, rigid and sober type of expression, which Humble terms "scientific food writing" (Humble 2020: 198) – in other words: with as little 'bla bla' as possible. Others, like David, put more individuality into their texts and find "specific space for digression within the formally delineated structure of the recipe itself" (Humble 2020: 199), which allows authors to express themselves. It is useful to keep this in mind, when thinking about the recipes' pictures. It is rather obvious, that, if food photographs form an instructive element of the description on the one hand, they also offer pleasures beyond mere factuality on the other. To conceive of the recipe itself as a literary form helps to understand that the photograph, perceived as an attraction, is not a digression from the functionality of the written communication about food, but rather, an extension of an ambiguity that is inherent in the text type of the recipe.

The text type of the recipe is structured by different elements. At its most basic, a recipe is composed of three elements: the title and the name of the recipe, a list of ingredients and the description of the steps of the cooking process (also called 'method section'). The major innovation of the 19th-century cookbook was to separate the list of quantified ingredients from the method section, in which they had formerly been integrated. *Cooking for Modern Families*, first published in 1845 by Eliza Acton, is often credited with the introduction of a separate list of quantified ingredients, which was appended to the method section (Humble 2005: 10–11; 2020: 195; Carroll 2010: 67). Two decades later Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, first published in part-issues from 1859 on (Damkjær 2014), moved the ingredients further up, positioning them before the instructions. Working with a larger and less canonical corpus, Henry Notaker (2017: 115–116) has shown that a list of ingredients, printed in a separate column, had been realized as early as 1817. More important though than correctly identifying the first, is the insight that there was no revolution that turned the ingredient section into a norm overnight. It co-existed with the age-old two-part form for a century and only became established as the preferred structure way into the 20th century (Wolańska-Köller 2012: 182–189; Carroll 2010: 68; Notaker 2017: 116). This structural change is part of a modernization and redefinition of the cookbook, which was brought about by a shift of usership. Formerly, cookbooks had been directed at male professional cooks employed in noble and wealthy

households, whereas since the middle of the 19th century more and more of them addressed bourgeois housewives, giving them directions for an efficient and economical household management (Wiedemann 1993; Beetham 2003; Damkjær 2014; Coydon 2015; Notaker 2017, 123–125). The demand for printed replacements or supplements for orally transmitted cooking knowledge increased potential readership to an extent which incited dynamic publication activities and the development of cookbook concepts adapted to the new customers.

It is obvious that most of the recipes published today are not restricted to just three components. Already Acton frequently supplements observations, which add information on the ingredients, give possible variations or indicate how to serve the respective dish. In Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, the list format is not limited to the ingredients, but continues to indicate the preparation time, the "average cost," the number of servings and when it is "seasonable," sometimes even adding further tips as "note." Linguistic research has identified and differentiated such supplementary elements and variations of the three-part structure (Tomlinson 1986: 203–204, 207–208; Wolańska-Köller 2012: 109–114, 191). Among the different potential supplements, Humble has singled out that "preliminary remarks" putting the recipe into a context had currently become "the dominant practice," thus eventually building up to a "four part structure" (2020: 199–200). Still, the tripartite form stands out as the core of the modern recipe, insofar the graphic separation of the list of ingredients makes a text instantly identifiable as a recipe (Carroll 2010: 67), even if the distinction of the list may materialize in a range of different shapes. Print culture has stabilized the text structure of the recipe into a conventional pattern of composition, a 'typographic dispositive' (Wehde 2000: 14), which indicates that a given text belongs to this text type.[4]

It is telling that linguistic descriptions of the recipe typically fail to include pictures either as a characteristic element or at least as a common supplement (Tomlinson 1986; Liebman Parrinello 1996; Wolańska-Köller 2012), sometimes even if the cases discussed integrate a picture (Cölfen 2007: 86). When pictures are considered as part of the recipe (Carroll 2010: 69; Coutherut 2018, par. 15) they are still only discussed in passing. This neglect of systematic reflection stands in stark contrast to the ubiquity of pictures in cookbooks at least since the second half of the 20th cen-

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4   Wolańska-Köller (2012: 188) notes that in Germany the typographic distinction of description and ingredients began to be employed around 1900, long before the three-part structure has been firmly established as norm.

tury.[5] Today, it is very uncommon to find a published recipe that is not associated with a – usually photographic – picture.

Most of the text-linguistic research on the recipe is motivated by the historical interest in tracing the text type from medieval to modern usage (Liebman Parrinello 1996; Görlach 2004: 121–140; Coutherut 2018). From this vantage point it would be easy to maintain that food photographs are neither a necessary nor important part of the recipe, because for the most part of its history the descriptive text lacked pictures. Put differently, it is possible to imagine a functioning recipe void of pictures, but it would be hardly possible to create a recipe out of pictures alone. This is what *La cuisine sans bla bla* sets out to do, but fails to follow through with.[6] Therefore, it seems admissible to regard the pictures as something that can be added to the recipe instead of possibly forming a relevant element of it. It is plausible, though, that, when a picture is provided, it must be considered a part of the information that the recipe tries to impart. Coutherut distinguishes two functions which integrate the photograph into the recipe: Firstly, a seductive function which is inciting readers to choose one recipe over another competing one in the cookbook, and secondly a descriptive function, showing what the dish should look like when completed (2018, par. 15). Based on the observation that recipe texts typically cross-reference the corresponding photograph, Carroll downplays the pictures' function "as a browsing aid," and instead points out "that the photograph is primarily intended to aid in creating the dish rather than in choosing a recipe" (2010: 69). Even if the function of photographs can vary more than Carroll would suggest,[7] it is important to note that 'recipe pictures' – of the prepared dish –, which typically accompany recipes, form a substantial part of the information that is provided. With the aim to give a most complete description of the preparation, recipe text and recipe picture work together in complementary ways. The recipients of the recipe are thus addressed not only as readers, but as reader-viewers. Today, users and readers expect a photographic picture as an

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5   This neglect also harms major histories of the cookbook (Humble 2005; Notaker 2017; Elias 2017), which reserve just a few pages for the subject of photography and 'illustration' in general. Most startling in this respect is Eric Quaile's *Old Cookbooks. An Illustrated History* (1978) which contains plenty of pictures, without discussing them. For an exception consult the brief history in journal article format in Dennis 2008.

6   This remains true for recipe videos like the ones posted on the famous *Tasty* YouTube channel which largely craft a narrative produced from a montage of gestures. But they cannot renounce words when it comes to the title and quantifying ingredients.

7   This view seems too restrictive, as in browsing a broader corpus it becomes obvious that it is difficult to generalize: references can go both ways, from text to picture, but also the other way round. In most cases today the layout eliminates the necessity of references, by placing recipe text and recipe picture on facing pages, so that the double page devoted to one recipe turns its two components into an intermedial whole.

integral element of a recipe. It is necessary, therefore, to study closely how the image-text combinations in recipes work.

An alternative conception of the text-image relation is put forward by German linguist Hermann Cölfen, who argues that the pictures belong to the cookbook rather than to the recipe: "The 'classic' recipe is mostly just one part within a broader book concept that can include many other components beyond the recipe part: pictures, narrative elements, background information, shopping tips, etc." (2007: 86, my transl.) It is somewhat illogical to isolate the 'classic' recipe text from its extensions, since the pictures are usually connected to the recipe, as are the other supplements. But it is appropriate to put the emphasis on the defining role of the publishing site for the recipe. Eventually, it is not some internal logic of the recipe – as single specimen as well as text type – that will determine which elements a recipe should contain, but rather its context of publication, be it a food blog, a recipe platform, a magazine or a book. Whereas recipes can stand alone in principle, they usually are elements of larger wholes consisting of more than one recipe, which follow a certain order and are contextualized by further textual and pictorial material. It has always been the case that recipes have normally appeared in a collection; as Liebman Parrinello states: "The 'natural' historical trajectory leads from the individual recipe to the recipe collection." (1996: 294, my transl.) In these contexts, every recipe intertextually refers to the accompanying others so that together they form a unit. It follows, that such collections don't throw together ready-made recipes, but, on the contrary, define in each case which recipes may enter the collection at all and how they need to be designed to conform to the overall concept.[8] In the context of the cookbook, recipes are organized as serialized content that is tied together by a shared orientation and consistent formal traits throughout. It is the book that defines the status of the recipes with regard to the role that they play for the overall concept: given the context, they can be made to demonstrate the culinary merits of a country, a region or a specific chef, represent one variety inside a certain genre of dishes or exemplify an easy to cook meal.

That said, the concept of the book defines not only the quantity, selection and form of the recipes, but also the number, size, style and medium of the pictures as

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8   The linguist Hermann Cölfen (2007: 88–89, my transl.) distinguishes three genres of books, which contain recipes: "recipes in recipe collections," which are limited to the minimal format of the recipe (as in most cookbooks before the mid-20th century, cramming together hundreds of often numbered recipes); "[t]hematically oriented cookery literature using pictorial elements as well as narrative and factual subtexts," which include the bulk of contemporary offerings; "cooking schools," in which the recipes serve a general introduction to cooking and are therefore supplemented by additional explanations. Whereas this typology covers the book market of the 20th century quite well, to adequately represent the cookbook market of the last two to three decades a closer look at the second category of the "thematically oriented" publications would be expedient.

well as their layout with respect to the written content. On the one hand, the chosen recipes dictate which dishes need to be depicted, on the other, a recipe may be just as well selected due to its visual appeal, in other words, because the dish makes excellent material for an enticing photograph.[9] A cookbook will often be designed primarily to instruct cooking, but may also be conceived for pleasurable viewing-reading and for the coffee table. In fact, it is the latter scenario that fuels the cookbook market, as it stands as the most convincing selling point to justify offering ever more publications to consumers most of whom already own more cookbooks than they will practically be able to use. In this respect, cookbook author Brenda Houghton (1994) observes: "Illustrated books are not intended for the kitchen shelf: they are for the bedside table, for dreaming, for wish-fulfilment. And people buy whole shelves of them." Harking back to earlier reflections on different functions of recipes, it is therefore advantageous to distinguish the two main practices afforded by cookbooks: The recipes included may be either *used* as instructions for cooking or *read* and viewed as 'illustrated literature.'[10] Depending on the concept materialized in the design of the book, the propensity to use or to read will not be balanced equally, but nonetheless both options remain open.

If the form of a cookbook does not determine its use, its look betrays what was envisioned by the publisher. The layout – and the design in general – is a "form of non-verbal communication" which reveals "the way in which the recipes are expected to be used, and about the relationship between the individual recipes and the collection which contains them" (Carroll 2010, 62). The design of the cover, the weight of the book, the quality of the paper, the size of the pages, the dimensions and quantity of the food photographs, the referencing between pictures and text, indicate whether the recipes are rather intended for cooking or for looking. Along these lines, the value of the photograph for the recipe should be appraised not by focusing on the single recipe, but by reconstructing the pattern in its serial deployment across recipes. The layout can either favor the photos' function for the practical use of the recipes or highlight the aesthetic appreciation of the composition, colors and textures, which the recipe pictures present. In short, it needs to be ascertained to what

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9   That this supposed primacy of photogenicity over taste will feed back into the practice of cooking can be assumed long before Instagram. Houghton (1994), long-time women's editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine*, laments that the lavishly illustrated cookbooks, though they served only for bedside browsing, impacted the cultural recipe archive: "Nobody photographs succulent roast meat and gravy, or a steak and kidney pie, because this is brown food and brown food looks dull. So these recipes slowly disappear from our repertoire. I once had to drop a delicious meat loaf recipe because it couldn't help looking like dog food."

10   I follow the terminology but deviate from the judgement of Carroll who argues that the text type of the recipe presupposes to be 'used' ("for information") instead of being 'read' ("for entertainment"), but admits that there "exist books that blur this distinction" (2010: 70).

extent the picture serves to embellish the book or to add to the recipe's description of a dish's preparation.

But how can a photograph relate to a recipe? Contrary to drawn and painted pictures, photographs cannot be derived directly from texts, for they capture, first and foremost, fragments of the reality in front of the camera lens. Roland Barthes has argued that this innovation revolutionized the relation of word and image in the print media. Instead of the traditional mode of illustration, in which a picture serves to "to elucidate or 'realize' the text" (Barthes 1977a [1961]: 25), photographs typically follow the mode of "anchoring," in which text (condensed in the form of the caption) interprets a given picture (1977b [1964]: 38–40; for further discussion with respect to print culture see Ruchatz 2022: 113–117). Instead of the picture "illustrating the words," the words are now "parasitic of the picture" (Barthes 1977a [1961]: 25). This logic can be seen at work in the use of photojournalistic pictures in illustrated magazines. In cookbooks, however, photographs generally refer to a text that logically precedes them, since they capture and showcase realities created from recipes. Food photographs should be considered as staged photographs, insofar as they create a reality in front of and for the camera that is quintessentially constructed and completely under control. In the process of illustrating recipes, professional specialists work together on three levels: Chefs and studio cooks, who realize the recipe; food and prop stylists, who often design the plating and frequently incorporate the plated dish into a more complex visual arrangement; and finally, the photographers, who illuminate the arrangement, transfer it into an image from a specific perspective and with a chosen framing. Therefore, this variety of staged food photography, representing a recipe, is multi-authored – or sometimes not authored at all, as it often used to be the case that the creators were not credited. In the case of food photography the picture serves an illustrative function not only genetically, as it visualizes what the recipe text describes with words; in doing so the recipe picture also illuminates and clarifies what the recipe text is meant to lead to.[11] The photograph offers a

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11   Another relevant dimension of the photo-text relation in the cookbook concerns the picture's temporality. It is frequently claimed that, by virtue of their photochemical ontology, photographs cannot but refer back to the past, more exactly to the moment, when the light created a trace on the photosensitive layer. In this respect, a food photograph would prove that a recipe had already been successfully realized once in a particular visual arrangement. This could easily be applied to cookbooks which aim to document a cuisine, as in some publications of renowned chefs, which most cookbook owners would not dare to try out themselves: The photographic recipe picture forms part of the documentation of a culinary artwork. For cookbook *users*, however, the recipe is always looking into the future, in which it will be or at least could be realized. The recipe may be seen as a promise of a successful, delicious outcome (Tomlinson 1986: 211). It is the photographs which make this prospect tangible, by visually suggesting not something past, but what could be, because it has been (Ruchatz 2018).

sensualization of the content which is encoded in the abstraction of writing.[12] Thus, it could be argued, that the food picture in the cookbook adheres as closely to an illustrative function as a photograph can.

For a user leafing through a cookbook, the picture will not appear as a secondary extension of the text, however, but rather come first as an eye catcher which draws the attention to a particular recipe.[13] The same typically happens in a bookstore, when an appealing cover photo, easily visible from a distance, may motivate a potential customer to engage more with a book, probably first and foremost its pictures. Most food photographs are easy to grasp in a glance, whereas reading requires more time and a closer look. A typical cookbook layout of today prefigures this viewing logic by using page size pictures throughout, thereby making it attractive to browse a cookbook by just looking at the photographs. In this case, the words of the recipe text might just as well serve as anchor providing an interpretation of what is in the picture. Most of the contemporary cookbooks reserve at least half of each double-page for photography and invite reader-viewers to flip through the pictures. Photographs arranged on the page without borders – and in this respect contrasted with the text – underline the claim of photography to dominate the layout and not to be subordinate to the word.

That said, it is difficult to ascertain which mode is dominant: The image-word constellations in the cookbook cannot be grasped with a sharp distinction between anchoring and illustration. Neither are food photographs just fragments of reality that are anchored in the cookbook through verbal interpretation, nor can their dominant presence in the layout be reduced to an illustration drawn from a text. For image-word constellations in contemporary cookbooks, which most often progress by a series of recipe text/recipe picture couples, meeting on a double page, I want to propose the new term 'parallelization,' since the books allow reader-viewers to instantly switch between text and picture, without a limiting hierarchy. Reader-viewers may jump from text to picture or vice versa as well as browse just the pictures or, even if unlikely, only read the recipes. Inside the parallelized structure, which cookbooks are modelled on, the recipe photo can still selectively serve as an instructive illustration of the recipe text or the photographic recipe image can be anchored and interpreted with the help of a recipe text.

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12   This observation refers to the medial level of the codification of writing only, which materializes on the printed page: Obviously, words can be used to feed the visual imagination of readers.

13   For the discrepancy between the logics of production versus reception in image-word constellations see Ruchatz 2022: 114–115.

3.   Historical Materialisations of the Recipe Photograph

Considering the entire history of the printed cookbook, which goes back to the 15th century (Willan/Cherniavsky/Claflin 2012: 38–63), the recipe picture is a rather recent achievement (Day 2004: 98–101). From the beginning, there were cookbooks which contained pictures. Most of these featured only one picture, their frontispiece, which typically either showed a portrait of the author or an allegorical still life, both with the aim of ennobling cuisine (Fink 1996: 100; Bickham 2008: 480–481). The frontispiece position could also be filled with "illustrated scenes of cookery" (Bickham 1996: 482; see also Day 2004: 104). The most common pictorial feature were diagrams which modeled the ideal order at the table, which was relevant for representative occasions as large banquets (Bickham 2008: 477; Fink 1996: 98; Day 2004: 103–122). But one thing that was never depicted were prepared and plated meals (Fink 1996: 92; Coutherut 2018: par. 14): Recipes were not illustrated. What comes closest to the dishes – instructing their preparations in the kitchen or their serving at the table – were simple line diagrams displaying kitchen utensils (Fink 1996: 93–94), indicating how to carve meat or giving designs for pies, pastry and confectionery (Day 2004: 100–101, 122–147). In the branch of *pâtisserie* and *confiserie*, for which the spectacular design of the external shape was (and still is) of foremost importance and visual beauty was even considered to be its most pertinent yardstick of value (Boutaud 2012: 92; Csergo 2012: 19–20), "images of actual food" (Day 2004: 129) could appear. But these specialized representations, which display models for sculptural or even architectural creations, diverge very much from the usual recipe pictures, insofar as the perfect surfaces of their culinary achievements detach their appearance as much as possible from the materiality of their construction.

In the 19th century, despite the new audience for cookbooks, the situation changes only slowly. In print technology the broad introduction of wood engraving from the 1820s onwards permits cheaper production of reproducible images, which can easily be printed along with typeface, whereas traditional engraved pictures needed to be bound in as plates, inevitably separated from the corresponding text passages (Desbuissons 2022: 39; Ruchatz 2022: 119–122). If the majority of cookbook publications in the 19th century were still devoid of imagery, the innovation of wood engraving meant that the number of images in a cookbook could be easily increased, given that the publishers had decided to invest in pictures at all.[14] As general information on the origin and quality of foodstuffs and materials took up an important part of many cookbooks, somehow acting as cooking schools, the

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14   For an inventory of the types of cookbook pictures on the eve of the introduction of photome-chanical illustration see Ruchatz 2017: 281–285.

depiction of animals, plants, fruits and vegetables become a recurrent feature.[15] These subjects allowed to increase the number of illustrations and more often than not the decorative function stands out. However, it was important for cookbook authors to insist that their images did not just serve decorative purposes but were instrumental to their didactic aims. To name but one example, Jules Gouffé, author of probably the pictorially most refined cookbook publication of the 19th century (1867),[16] featuring 25 lavish and finely nuanced chromolithographs (for an extended study of the iconography see Desbuissons 2018), pointed out:

> although the plates are undoubtedly a very great addition to the appearance of the work, they were not introduced merely on that account, but also materially to assist the culinary teaching, which has been my first object in writing the book. […] Whenever a sketch has seemed to me necessary to make an operation clear, I have introduced it, convinced of the advantage young cooks will derive, whilst working from this book, from having correct representations, which they will be able to follow exactly. (Gouffé 1868: XV-XVI)
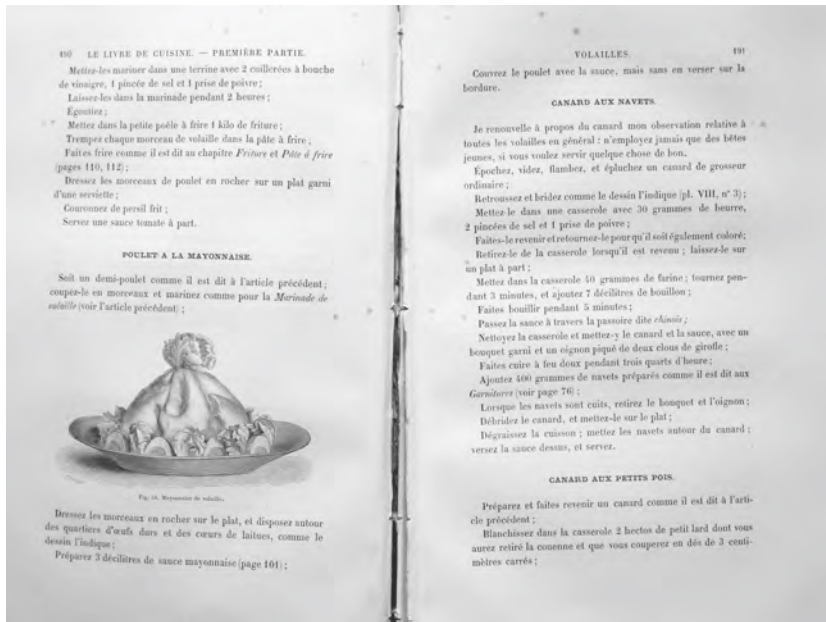
Gouffé attributed the use value of illustration – as a complement to verbal description – to the principle that cooking should be learned not least through observation and study.

If recipe pictures were included in the illustrated cookbooks of the 19th century, they still mainly concerned dishes, whose sculptural and elaborate design was in particular need of a pictorial model – and made for better pictorial content than, say, a pot of stew. The respective food was presented on a plate, avoiding any further contextualization of the situation (fig. 3). The black and white engravings were inserted directly into the corresponding recipe text, in order to make clear that they form an integral element of the recipe. This entailed that the recipe pictures were designed to take up little space and thus turned out relatively small. Among the hundreds or even thousands of recipes a cookbook of this time gathered, only a small fraction was pictorially treated. It was only photography that established the pictured dish as the staple of cookbook illustration. This suggests that the photographic recipe picture must have brought about something new and conveyed relevant dimensions of the food. I argue that photography put a new emphasis on the sensuality of food, leaving the construction drawings of the graphic representations behind.

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15   For example, the bulk of the illustrations in Beeton (1861) is of this type, clearly used as a drawcard to motivate customers to stick with the serial part-issue publication.

16   Gouffé's book was published in Paris in 1867 and quickly translated into English, Spanish, Dutch, German, and at the end of the century also into Italian. The layout follows the same concept across the national editions. There is some variation, however, with regard to the number of color plates.

Fig. 3: Wood engraved recipe picture for Mayonnaise de volaille *in Gouffé's* Le Livre de cuisine. *Double-page size: 34.4 × 25.6 cm.*

Source: Gouffé 1867: 190–191.

   In the following pages I will look briefly at four examples drawn from cookbooks and a news magazine of the 20th century to shed light on the development of the recipe picture after the invention of photography. This small selection condenses the analysis of a much larger corpus, but the sample is, of course, limited and incidentally biased towards US material.[17] What matters is just that these cases allow me to access the bigger picture, which I will paint here only with broad brushstrokes. My main interest in this will be to elaborate how the photograph interacts with the recipe text and to what extent the recipe picture is interested in conveying the sensuality of the food in a sensually – i.e., visually – enticing depiction.
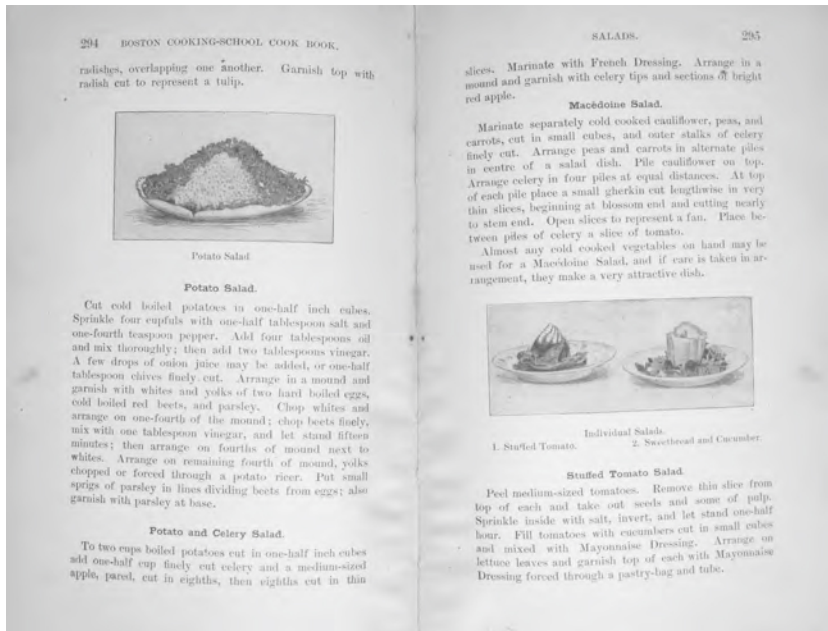
3.1 Mush on the plate

To my knowledge, Fannie Farmer's *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, initially published in 1896, is the first cookbook publication making use of the recent innovation of the half-tone process to reproduce its imagery (fig. 4). Some of the pictures

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17   The article is part of a larger and ongoing project of reconstructing the history of photography in the cookbook, which was first and more extensively presented in Ruchatz 2017.

are heavily retouched, but in most cases the photographic image source can be surmised. The sharpness and definition of the photographs contained in the first edition leaves a lot to be desired, the small size of the reproduction even making things worse. It is difficult to even make out what is depicted without recourse to the caption: If we go by the words, the picture on the left page depicts potato salad, the one on the right a stuffed tomato side by side with sweetbread and cucumber salad. In the photographs every dish appears arranged on a plate, then cut out and subsequently endowed again with suggested materiality by an artificial shadow, which is produced by a few manual hatchings. The character of the meal, its textures or even the ingredients can hardly be discerned from the picture. What remains is a decontextualized shape that can give a vague orientation how the prepared dish could be presented at the table.

Fig. 4: Photographs of 'Potato Salad' *and* 'Individual Salads' *from the* Boston Cooking-School Cook Book. *Double-page size: 24.3 × 19.2 cm.*

Source: Farmer (1896): 294–295.

As principal of the Boston Cooking School, Farmer championed a rational and science-based approach to cooking (Shapiro 1986: 106–126; see also Humble 2020:

196; Elias 2017: 32–37; Carroll 2010: 68).[18] Therefore, it could be assumed that photography's technical image would have suited the direction of the cookbook. However, the choice of using photographic images as recipe pictures is not even mentioned in the preface, which suggests that the innovation might have been received skeptically. The fact that photographic images were cheaper to produce and reproduce may just as well have driven the decision. At this stage, the visual quality could hardly account for the use of photographic images, because they fell far short of the standards set by the long-established wood engraving in this respect.

Meanwhile, the layout stuck to the established patterns. The recipe pictures were inserted right before the recipe texts, acting as a sort of pictorial introduction. As in Gouffé's book, the captions repeated the name of the recipe to rule out uncertainties. The framing of the pictures is efficiently adapted to their respective subjects, which are cropped tightly, not wasting any space on the page, with the result that the picture format varies from case to case. Viewed over the entire volume, photography was not used to increase the habitual share of illustrations: While a few double pages boast two photographs, passages of more than sixty pages devoid of pictorial decoration exist as well. A photograph appears only when the artful presentation of a particular dish seems to ask for one. Moreover, the number of pictures is limited by technical constraints of photography. Black and white food photographs require a graphically organized object that is sculptured. In a cookbook, which is neither aimed at professionals nor households with servants, the quantity of such recipes diminishes: In the *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* recipe pictures harmonize best with salads, fish, deserts and pieces of raw meat. In this early example, the photographs seem to replace the wood engravings, without further change. The basic communicative parameters remain unchanged, but the poor picture quality manages to even reduce the potential to pictorially evoke the pleasures of tasting.
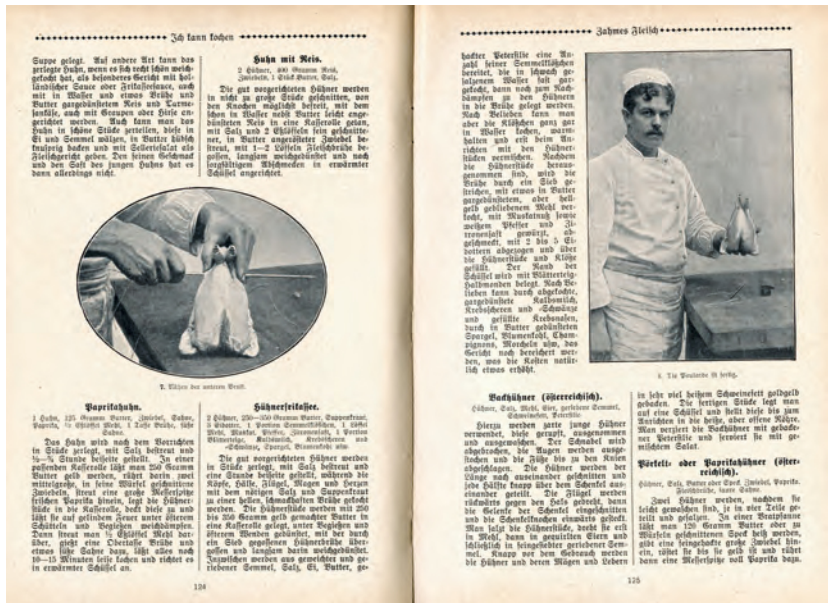
Only a few years later, new cookbooks, among them an edition of the Fannie Farmer cookbook with a totally renewed iconography (Farmer 1906),[19] tried to remedy the problem of the muddy half-tone reproductions by re-introducing plates, on which two or three exposures were printed on coated paper. As the downside of this solution, the 'neighborly' relation of recipe text and picture was severed and replaced by cross-referencing (Ruchatz 2017: 285–287). Whereas the picture quality improved, the restriction to selected groups of dishes remained. A more inventive alternative, chosen by the 1909 German publication *Ich kann kochen*, was to do away

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18   Besides the very successful cookbook (Shapiro 1986: 112), the campaign extended to the launch of the long running *Boston Cooking School Magazine*, which equally relied on photographic images from the very beginning, starting with a modest number, but rapidly increasing in quantity.

19   The revised edition's title page finally advertised the inclusion of "one hundred half-tone illustrations" (Farmer 1906).

with recipe pictures altogether. Instead, the volume innovated step-by-step photography, spreading the series of pictures covering one step in the process over several pages (fig. 5; Ruchatz 2017: 287–290). According to a different logic, step-by-step photographs could conform more exactly to the objective of illustrating a recipe, as they follow the preparation of a meal as a process, trying to capture the manual sensuality of the cook's movements and gestures.

Fig. 5: Step-by-step photographs depicting two steps of the dressing of a chicken in Ich kann kochen. *Double-page size: 31.5 × 22.9 cm.*

Source: Urban 1909: 124–125.

3.2 The colorful table

The major obstacle that would mar any attempt to represent dishes that were less sculpturally modelled than the sugary artifices of the confectioners was the lack of color in the picture, regardless of the distinction between photography and engraving.[20] Even if the quality of black and white photographic reproductions improved and their size increased, what could be made to look appetizing in black and white

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20   For a brief overview of color in cookbooks see Poulain 2008.

was very limited. It took color photography, which had more means to render structure and texture in objects, to change this. In Alice Kuhn's small vegetarian cookbook *Käse-, Milch- & Rahmspeisen* (1927) this revolution is instantly visible. The photographs made the surfaces of cheesecake and buttered toast visually tangible (fig. 6), as well as exploring the textures of spaghetti with parmesan, cauliflower au gratin and fried eggs with cheese. These recipes did not prescribe an elaborately constructed surface and shape, for which the users were in need of a visual orientation.[21] In contrast, it was simple recipes that got picture treatment, because they now looked appealing. Although the pictures betray some retouching, they celebrate their capability to render the materiality of their object, even paying attention to incidentals like the texture of the fabric of the tablecloth or the play of the light on the plate. This observation leads to another factor, which is changing the recipe picture of the 1920s, if not exclusive to its color variety. Still, color advances the new form of composition, in which the plated dish is no longer isolated, but situated on a table and thus in the context of a prospective eating situation, which draws the viewer more strongly into the image. At the same time, the design of the spatial environment opened up the opportunity to propose an interpretation of the dish and to introduce additional graphic and colorful elements on the aesthetic level.[22]
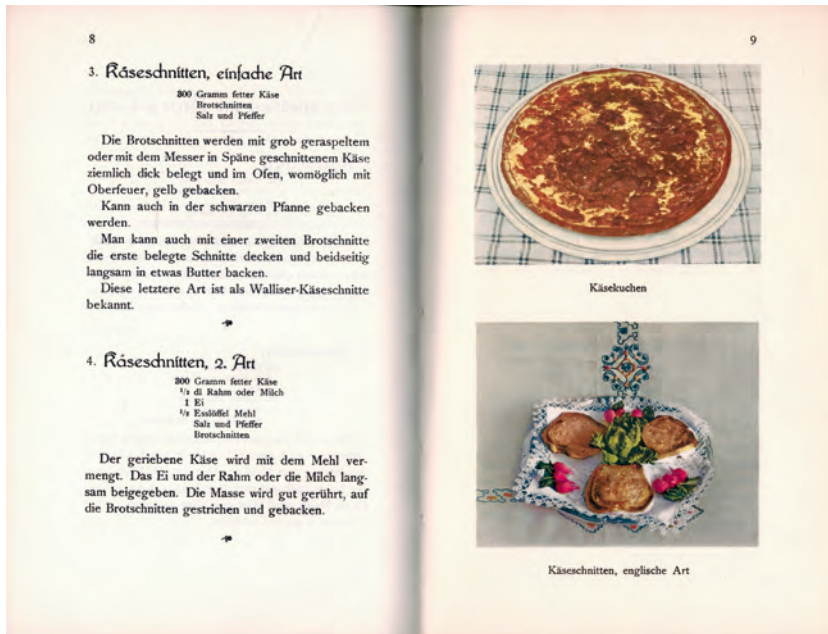
Kuhn's book relies on the Uvachrome process (on the background see Jaeger 2014: 612–613) to produce the color imagery, one of the more or less experimental processes which were used before the reversal films of Kodak and AGFA took over the scene from 1936 onwards (Boulouch 2011: 93–116). Already at the end of the 19th century, printing half-tone reproductions in color was an economical rather than a technical issue. The technology was frequently employed to reproduce art works on paper. Indeed, it was the effort required to take the photos, which could be reproduced, that hindered the further spread of color in print. The earliest gastronomic publications boasting color food photography addressed professionals. *The Book of Bread* (Simmons [1903]), published in 1903 by the magazine *The British Baker*, included twelve close-up shots of so-called 'prize loaves.' Even if the photographic basis had difficulty in optically prevailing against the heavy retouching, the play of soft and crispy textures as well as the variation in the brown hues had a photographic appeal. In 1913, the owner of the Dresden confectionery school published a manual

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21   Nevertheless, Kuhn's preface asserts that the color photographs were intended to ensure "that spot checks can determine whether the recipe has been correctly recorded and executed" (Kuhn 1927: 6).

22   Other cookbooks continue to cut the plated dish out, with the intention to contrast it starkly against a monochrome background, to bring out the colors of the meal in the best way; for the example of the publications of Swiss author Frida Nietlispach, starting in 1928, see Ruchatz 2017: 291–292.

illustrated with 111 plates of color photographs, showing top shots of cake decorations to serve as models (Weber 1913). Over the next decades, Weber continued to successfully produce updated version of his color-photographic manual, frequently in international multi-language editions. Of course, the sensual dimension was reduced here to scanning the artfully crafted surfaces of the confectionery, whereas the taste, smell and texture were not implied.[23]

Fig. 6: Photographs of a cheesecake and rarebits in Käse-, Milch- & Rahmspeisen. *Double-page size: 26.7 × 20.5 cm.*

Source: Kuhn 1927: 8–9.

Color-photography cookbooks for the general public did not gain momentum until the mid-1920s. One year before Kuhn, corporate food producer Procter & Gamble published a small format cookbook to promote its shortening brand Crisco, which contained a few well-done recipe pictures in color, without drawing attention to this particular feature (Field Splint 1926). Kuhn's book is more ambitious, insofar it is completely in color, comprising sixteen recipe pictures inside and four more

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23   For an inspiring but unsystematic selection of further examples of food photography in color, see Bright 2017.

on the cover. It is to be noted, that the majority of these early publications in color were specialized cookbooks, which only contained few recipes that covered small fields of cooking, compared to the several hundreds of standard cookbooks. Put differently, it is cookbooks that are meant to be bought in addition to the ones which one already owned.

Fig. 7: *Photograph of various rolls in* The American Woman's Cook Book. *Double-page size: 25.1 × 20.1 cm.*

Source: Berolzheimer (1942): p. 106 and n.p.

As a special attraction that breaks up the usual series of black and white pictures, color photography soon also conquered general cookbooks, targeting a broad audience in large editions. Some of these publications follow a modified aesthetic in their color imagery, which has progressed significantly from *Käse -, Milch- & Rahm-speisen* and shows where food photography was heading. Regarding the texts, Ruth Berolzheimer's *American Woman's Cook Book* (1938) built on the cookbooks published by the recently defunct women's magazine *The Delineator*. Along with others, their black and white food photographs had championed an aesthetic, which has become so pervasive in food photographs, that it is hard to spot (Ruchatz 2017: 295; 2019: 224–225). The composition is determined by two principles. First, the table is not

photographed frontally, but from an angle above, so that the objects on the table surface are not lined up horizontally or vertically but are arranged in slants or diagonals. Secondly, the photograph marks its cropped nature by deliberately creating cuts. It is not farfetched to assign an overarching message to these design elements. The impression suggested by the bleeds that the table goes on without limits is reinforced by the diagonals, which visually accentuate the depth extension of the pictorial space. In other words, the composition of the photograph expresses abundance.

The American Woman's Cookbook continues this aesthetic, blows up the size of the pictures to full page, frames the table scenes in close-up and uses color photography (fig. 7). The borderless arrangement of the image on the page transforms the page itself into a cutout, a window onto the culinary delights. The close-up allows the viewer to indulge in the textures, but leaves only a few objects intact, without being cut by the frame. And even the rolls which are left 'intact' reciprocally conceal parts of each other. Therefore, instead of identifying the objects, we are invited to explore the textures offered by the basket, the knife, the cake and the pastries. We are offered a close look at the environment of a laid coffee table, which leaves to imagination what happens outside the tightly cropped photo's margins. The dust cover advertises the merits of the cookbook's iconography, pointing out:

> The essential purpose of visual education is accomplished by hundreds of beautiful halftone photographs that explain … as words never can … just how to repeat in your own home the triumphs of culinary experts. And, by seeing the actual result delectably illustrated, often in glowing full color, you will be inspired to undertake new and interesting recipes that will add variety to your menus. (Berolzheimer 1942: back flap)

Here, the primacy of the sensual exploration of the visual is laid out for reader-viewers, who can become users after they indulged in the pictures, then checking the pictures for "how your food should look when it comes to the table" (Berolzheimer 1942: front flap). In the case of the American Woman's Cook Book's color plates the viewers will have to scour for the corresponding recipes, as these pictures lack a specific reference. If cookbooks still instruct how to cook, they enrich the reception with a visual experience that can lead back to the kitchen but can also be sufficient in itself. The feature introduced by the use of color is image information of unprecedented density, which allows a differentiated rendering of textures through color and thereby expands the field of photogenic foods. Interesting shades and contrasts become more salient than the clear shape and graphic structure. Eventually, it is not so much color itself which is at stake, but the complex play of textures which it permits: "The full-color illustrations in The American Woman's Cook Book reproduce with striking fidelity the tempting texture of nicely browned chicken, the appetizing hue

of roast beef done to a turn, and the verdant crispness of leafy salads." (Berolzheimer 1942, n.p.)

3.3 The full picture

Fig. 8: Photograph of a paella in Life *January 31 1964. Double-page size: 53.4 × 35.5 cm.*

Source: Life (1964).

The large pages of *Life Magazine* (1964) are entirely taken up with a food photograph of a paella served in a black ceramic bowl (fig. 8). A narrow vertical strip of image on the far left of the double-page, takes the viewer even closer to the surface of the rice, on which minute saffron threads are visible that have already colored one half of the rice yellow. The main image, looking from the side, puts more focus on the seafood which always adds a touch of luxury to a paella. A shallow depth of field also creates the impression of a space virtually endless in depth, filled with paella. On the right, the tail of a shrimp protrudes beyond the edge of the bowl, opening the picture into the space of the viewer, where the small block of white type also seems to be situated, contrasting with the black of the bowl's glaze in the background. The close-up achieved by massive cropping brings the viewer's eye so close to the edible pictorial objects that the diverse textures of the crustaceans, mussels, and rice become tangible. In its interweaving of surface and depth, in its exciting distribution of colors, in its combination of side view and top shot, the picture is, however, also captivating in itself. In a publishing environment, saturated with advertisements vying for attention, producing full color double page spreads of food was one strategy to showcase the quality of the editorial content for which the subscribers actually paid.

The associated text, which encompasses the recipes for a complete menu formed around the depicted dish, as well as shopping and serving tips, contrasts with the image by its minuscule size alone, which forces the eye to move closer. Moreover, the recipes have to find the space between ads weighing on them from both sides in a visually dominant fashion so that it requires two double pages to conclude. On the previous page, the article on paella from January 1964 is announced as the first installment of a new series *Great Dishes of the World*, which is to be continued, if not in every number, at least once a month.

For the illustrated news magazine, the subject of food was so attractive because, in contrast to most other content, it readily translated into color photography. The initially significantly longer exposure times for color film (Boulouch 2011: 119; Schwartz 2020: 146, Timby 2015: 239) were not an obstacle for gastronomic 'still lives.' The more time-consuming processes of printing, which made color slow and expensive (Timby 2015: 237; Banham 2020: 453–454; Schwartz 2020: 146), were equally not an issue because the subject of food maintains a rather relaxed relationship to timeliness. Food photography, which is closely related to commercial product and advertising photography, also did not have the aesthetic reservations about color that occurred in photojournalism, for example (Timby 2015: 238). Lastly, color could be ideally controlled and shaped in the artificial studio situation (Schwartz 2020: 148). *Life* had already capitalized on this in the 1950s, at first irregularly running stories on cooking in its lifestyle department *Modern Living* (alongside fashion, gardening and interior design – all ideal color material), which were distinguished by large-format color images.[24] At the time, the competing organ *Look* was one step ahead in this respect and had already installed a weekly feature that combined recipes with lush color photography.

To continue my sequence of cookbooks with a magazine is justified because, as a neighboring print medium, it forms a relevant reference. Particularly in the U.S., high-circulation cookbooks were not infrequently published by women's magazines: *Delineator*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *McCall's* or *Good Housekeeping* developed cookbooks at one time or another, which in some cases enjoyed numerous editions.[25] Likewise, the French fashion monthly *Elle*, US culinary magazine *Gourmet* or the illustrated news weekly *Life* have brought cookbooks to the market. That magazines have had an influence on the development of the cookbook has been suspected, but not substantiated in the aesthetics of the magazine issues. Lynette Hunter observes that the in-house cookbook publications, produced by the respective magazine's staff, pave the way for a new form of publication, in which "the 'author' becomes the design team" (1991: 152). Where "the picture has to carry the burden of telling the story"

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24   Food photography in color occurred earlier in the advertisements than in the editorial content (Boulouch 2011: 87–90; Timby 2016: 236–237).

25   For an analysis of magazine's cookbooks from Britain see Hunter 1991: 142–146.

(Hunter 1991: 152), because simple "naturalistic" representations do not appeal to the buying public, recourse to a team of specialists had become mandatory (Hunter 1991: 144, 151–153). The result was cookbooks which did not mind to include deceptively illusionistic photographs which did not represent the recipe text. Concentrating on the production of the pictures, Hunter misses what happens on the page, though.

What puts the magazine aesthetically ahead of the cookbook is that it no longer conceives of food photography from the perspective of the recipe – because cookbooks remain collections of recipes in text and images – but dominantly, perhaps even exclusively, from the perspective of the photograph. Which recipes will be published in *Life* is not decided by the culinary excellence of the cuisine or the practicality of the recipe, but by its potential to produce a particularly spectacular image that can be stretched over at least a full page, or better yet, a double page. The text's treatment by the layout shows just how subordinate it is considered to be: While the recipe picture stands undividable on the double page, the recipe texts stretch over two to three double pages, because they have to share the space with advertisements.

The varying degrees of dominance of image over text was clearly evident when, in 1969, the recipe series *Great Dishes of the World* ended up in a book, that brought together a selection of 50 recipes from well over five years (Graves 1969). When the recipes enter the book, the recipe text nearly regains equality with the recipe picture. The opener for each recipe unit is again a pictorial double-page spread that nearly duplicates the one previously published in *Life*, but leaving the picture intact, while situating the dishes' name and introductory text in a white space, which delimits the image space on either side or at the bottom. Then follows a text double-page that unifies the associated recipe text, so that an impression of parity prevails.[26] In addition, the slightly smaller format of the book drains strength from the image, while it should be rather irrelevant to the text.[27] In the long run, however, the magazine has provided the cookbook with a model of how to successfully reverse the traditional hierarchy of recipe text and recipe picture. What the book could learn from the magazine was, first, to grant the individual picture at least as much room as the text and, secondly, to no longer print a recipe without a picture. Both of these principles gradually became standard in the cookbook sector in the 1970s and 1980s. The visually orchestrated recipe, which through the dimensions of the picture brings its textures as well as its color nuances into the spotlight, underscores the visual experience of the meal and sensitizes the eye to stimuli that it might previously have not known.

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26   This is sometimes counterbalanced by a small drawing signaling the end of the texts and acting as a page filler. The magazine version shows a similar feature, albeit with the vignettes situated in different positions inside the columns.

27   53.4 ×35.5 cm for the magazine, compared to 44.6 × 28.8 cm for the book.

3.4 The Sensuality of Gastro-Porn

Fig. 9: Photographs of String-bean salad *and* Hungarian cheese *in* Paul Bocuse's French Cooking. *Double-page size: 41 × 27.2 cm.*

Source: Bocuse 1977: n.p.

In 1976 Paul Bocuse published his signature cookbook *La cuisine du marché* under a title, that called for a simple and 'authentic' cuisine, built on fresh and local market produce.[28] As the French gastronomic movement *nouvelle cuisine* was just about to gain international recognition, it was only logical to quickly translate the first cookbook by a personality who acted as an international 'ambassador' for the French gastronomy and was arguably the most renowned representative of French *haute cuisine* of his time (Mognard: 191).[29] Just one year later a US edition became available under

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28   The book, whose full French title *La cuisine du marché, en hommage à Alfred Guérot* makes reference to a chef of the 1930s, was, however, as French critics noted, rather traditional than innovative (Mognard 2012: 189), which should have worked in favor of its usability for amateur cooks.

29   Hunter observes a "re-emergence of 'great chef' cookbooks over the last ten to fifteen years" (1991: 151). It is true that in the 19th century some of the most prominent chefs, mostly of French origin, like Marie-Antoine Carême, Alexis de Soyer and Auguste Escoffier left a legacy by writing cookbooks. The aspiration to become a public figure (as an artist) had to materialize in literary production (Garval 2007). Since the *nouvelle cuisine*, cookbook publication

the less programmatic title *Paul Bocuse's French Cooking* (Bocuse 1977).[30] Its distinctive design had somewhat re-invented the book: It used colored paper of a dark brownish hue; the layout reserved a small column for the ingredient list, which left more free space emphasizing the paper's color; for the headlines and recipe names the typography employed a handwriting font, even including squiggles. In choosing a sober and fine font interspersed with bold headings in a fresh red tone and printed on white paper throughout, the French version (Bocuse 1976) had opted for a more modern, clear and simple look, fitting the *esprit* of *nouvelle cuisine*. Addressing a different market, the US publisher apparently decided to give the book (Bocuse 1977) a more traditional, pastoral (perhaps aristocratic?) and, to American eyes, more European appearance.

The iconography of the book only comprised "[t]hirty-two beautiful four-color photographs," depicting "Bocuse's regal specialties and show[ing] how he presents them at the table" (Bocuse 1977: front flap), a very modest number if set in relation to its roughly 1150 single recipes. The photographs are reproduced on glossy coated paper, to optimize their quality. Whereas the French version had inserted the plates into the text, in close proximity to their corresponding recipes, the American translation established a separate section right at the end of the book, just before the index, which incited the reader-viewers to flip through the unpaginated photographs. The pictures of the US translation are captioned with the title of the recipe and page reference. The recipe text, however, does not link back to the photographs, which implies their limited instructional interest. In the end, the compact photographic section should probably be seen as a visual condensation of the essence of Bocuse's cuisine. As it would have been hardly possible to provide a recipe picture for every recipe text anyway, this strategy of a radical reduction seems particularly well-considered.

The shots are cropped tightly, but rarely cut into the main dish. It is made obvious that the integrity of the culinary work of art is key for the photographic documentation. The serving context for the plates, which is constructed inside the picture space, looks surprisingly traditional – not *nouveau* at any rate – with old-fashioned silver ware, filled wine glasses and noble tablecloths in the leading role, sometimes alternating with a country kitchen look. In the case of the double page reproduced here (fig. 9), the chaotic structure of the *String-bean salad* contrasts playfully with the fine lace doily, the smooth green peppers of the *Hungarian cheese* stand out from the

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has again become key to a chef's standing. However, the importance of the literary is pushed back today, as all available media – text, photos, graphic elements, typography – are collectively geared towards documenting the culinary works of art and often also towards making the personality of the cook visible (Ruchatz 2017: 305).

30   To underline the importance of the publication, it must be mentioned that *La cuisine du marché* got translated – at least – into English, German, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Dutch and Danish.

basket weave and the matte surface of the autumn maple leaves. The bright artificial illumination of the scenes is set up to induce highlights on reflecting objects, which helps to bring out the materiality of the dishes in the photographs. The layout design is simple. The photographs are all situated at the top of the page. The horizontal images leave nearly half of the page blank, only the vertical shots fill the pages, surrounded by a slim white frame. The continuous plate section allows the observation that the width of the picture varies slightly (between 17 and 20 cm) from picture to picture, giving each picture (and its dish) an individual treatment. Precisely because there are only a few images, they seem to be designed with particular care.

Bocuse's book is not alone in its decision to use color plates and do so sparingly. In French and German cookbooks of the time it is not uncommon to insert the recipe photographs this way (Ruchatz 2017: 297). What is more, the publications of Bocuse's *nouvelle cuisine* colleagues in the iconic series published by Robert Laffont, starring amongst others Michel Guérard, Alain Chapel, the Troisgros brothers and Roger Vergé, contented themselves as well with a very reduced color plate section, whereas, at the same time, some popular cookbooks already followed the policy that every recipe text needed to be complemented by a recipe picture.[31] The visual economy, reducing the amount of pictured dishes, seemed to be a characteristic of artful cuisine. Not to include any photographs would have, however, deprived the documentation of the culinary art of a core aspect. The photos' task is to represent the cuisine more than the particular recipes.[32]

For a history of the photograph in the cookbook, the iconography and the layout of *Paul Bocuse's French Cooking* do not make it an obvious choice, as the publication presents itself first and foremost as a literary achievement. It is not coincidental that Bocuse recommends to view his book "first as a novel to be read for enjoyment." (Bocuse 1977: ix) This makes it all the more amazing, that this very publication is reputed to have started the metaphorical equation of food pictures with pornography. Ann McBride (2010: 38) traces the first use of the porn metaphor back to a cookbook review in the 1977 Christmas issue of the *New York Review of Books*, in which Bocuse's book figures among the twelve publications discussed. This instance provides an adequate ending for an inquiry into the evolving status of photographic recipe pictures, since it motivates us to rethink the – visual – sensuality of the picture in connection with the sensuality of eating laid out in the recipe.

Reviewer Alexander Cockburn rants about *Paul Bocuse's French Cooking*:

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31   An early example is the *Hamlyn All Colour Cook Book* (1970), advertising "over 300 quick and easy recipes all illustrated in full colour" on its cover. The dustjacket of the 1990 printing claims that "over 2,000,000 copies" had already been sold.

32   For example, the *String-bean salad*, as shown in fig. 9, was mentioned by famed culinary critics Henri Gault and Christian Millau as a revelatory experience with regard to the foundation of the *nouvelle cuisine* (Drouard 2010: 108).

> It turns out really that the book is not actually a guide to practical cooking but rather a costly exercise ($20.00) in gastro-porn. Now it cannot escape attention that there are curious parallels between manuals on sexual techniques and manuals on the preparation of food; the same studious emphasis on leisurely technique, the same apostrophes to the ultimate, heavenly delights. True gastro-porn heightens the excitement and also the sense of the unattainable by proffering colored photographs of various completed recipes. [...] The delights offered in sexual pornography are equally unattainable. Roland Barthes made an equivalent point about ornamental cookery in *Mythologies* [...]. (Cockburn 1977: 18)

That the "cuisine ornementale," which had struck Barthes in the pages of a 1955 issue of *Elle* magazine (Barthes 2010 [1957]: 148–153), is now found in a cookbook, confirms the abovementioned model role of the magazine. From Barthes Cockburn borrows the verdict of 'unattainability.' However, quoting the unavailability of crayfish and black truffles in the US to validate his harsh judgement, is not a sound argument. Of course, some recipes require ingredients like truffles, foie gras or crayfish which might not only be hard to procure, but prohibitively expensive for most. Still, the vast majority of the hundreds of recipes are highly accessible, like the vegetable dishes reproduced above (fig. 9), crêpes or waffles, which had likewise received treatment in the plate section. By stating the literary objective of his cookbook, which Cockburn refers to mockingly, Bocuse had already given some sort of 'directions of use.' To accord with the concept of a *cuisine du marché*, he proposes to start reading in his book "to whet [one's] appetite" (Bocuse 1977: ix) (or to get 'aroused,' as Cockburn might have it), subsequently visit the local market and only then choose a recipe, starting from the produce factually obtained. That the lack of certain ingredients could require an adjustment of a recipe is already factored in: the user need not be "a slave to the book," but make use of "a certain margin of maneuver and [...] of fantasy" (Bocuse 1977: xiii), while keeping to the spirit. Bluntly, Cockburn derides nouvelle cuisine's claims to respect the authenticity and purity of the ingredients. The politics of *nouvelle cuisine* had primarily to do with the "history of publicity and the demands of the French tourist and restaurant industry rather than with gastronomy" (Cockburn 1977: 17).[33] Indeed, Cockburn seems to oppose any kind of refined cooking, considered by him as out of touch with reality, and finds it particularly despicable when it becomes a "solipsistic ritual" in the bourgeois household. Somewhat paradoxically, gastro-porn is criticized as publicity for and symptom of an ostensibly self-serving cooking practice.

Let us finally return to the pictures, however, and start from the alleged 'gastro-porn' photographs to illuminate the relation between recipe picture, recipe text and

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33   It could be surmised, that the contrived layout of the US edition might have fueled Cockburn's accusation of elitism more than the original French one would have, but Michel Guérard's *La cuisine minceur* is greeted with similar disdain.

the cookbook. If, for Cockburn, 'porn' extends also to the language of the 'manuals' – but do sex manuals actually equal pornography? – it is the photographs which get special attention: "True gastro-porn" required photographs of "completed recipes," because this "heightens the excitement and also the sense of the unattainable" (Cockburn 1977: 18, see above). The ambivalence, implied in the terminology of 'porn,' becomes evident. On the one hand, talking of 'porn' grants the recipe picture a sensual appeal of its own, which transgresses the verbal recipe text, characterizing it as site of pleasure. The recipe text does not have the same capacity to evoke affect and sensual pleasure as its visible materialization in the photographed dish of the recipe picture. On the other hand, the pleasure triggered is no more than ersatz, because the meal viewed remains materially unattainable for the viewer. With the identification of food photography with 'porn,' the image's power visually to evoke a sensual reality, which transcends vision, is acknowledged, but at the same time culturally devalued, not only as despicable, but even worse, as a deceptive illusion, which lays bare how strongly the viewers crave the – if only vicarious – excitement of their gustatory desires.

Based on this premise, every pictorial presentation of food could count as pornographic, as it materializes for the eyes something that is materially unattainable. To be more specific, the critique of food pornography generally presupposes that the difference between visual presence and material unavailability does not only exist in principle but is reinforced by deliberate efforts. On the one hand, this entails a pictorial aesthetic which strengthens the visual impression of presence, e.g. by introducing color, framing food in close-ups, lighting the dishes to render their texture and suggest their haptic qualities. On the other hand, the material unattainability can be supplemented with a social one, when the dish cannot be prepared, because required ingredients or cooking skills clearly exceed what is usually accessible. It is precisely this discrepancy that Cockburn observes in the photographs of Bocuse's recipes.

From a different point of view, the very aestheticization of the food photo could be seen as merely an extension of the habitual perceptive practices involved in eating. Given that the experience of eating is essentially synaesthetic, flavor is always conditioned and pre-figured by the external appearance of the food to be consumed. Inversely, the gustatory experience is itself prone to produce associated imaginary images (Boutaud 2012: 86–88). Thus, the visual aspect of food is not an extraneous and artificial addition but a natural and integral part of its complex sensory experience.[34] In the first place, it is therefore the synaesthetic interrelation of sensory impressions that allows to create pictures evoking the multi-sensory experience of food. The representation of food in any picture medium, therefore, does not need to

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34　That said, it is the malleability of this relation of the visible with the other senses which is frequently addressed by ambitious chef's to showcase their creativity (Boutaud 2012: 86, 90–91).

be restricted to an external view of the dish, but may infer the full sensory experience, by activating the viewers:

> The image has no shortage of expressive resources for staging, activating and vibrating this aesthetic world of flavor. It emerges from light, contrasts, colors, shapes, positions and orientations – in other words, from a compositional play that doesn't simply reproduce the external image of an object, but manifests, above all, our sensory relationship to it through a dominant sensory modality that orients the others. (Boutaud 2016: 222, my transl.)[35]

The food image does not simply address vision, but only takes the eye as a point of entry to access the other senses. As Boutaud remarks, food images stage not so much the food itself as the sensual relationship to it, inviting viewers to enter into a perceptual position which oscillates between viewing the picture as an object and gazing through it at the culinary object depicted. The impulse to enter in such a sensory relationship depends, of course, on the picture's design. Earlier aesthetics of the recipe photograph, following the engravings of the 19th century, were not well equipped to model sensory experiences and had to stay on the 'sculpted' surface of the objects, first and foremost due to unsurmountable technical limitations. If at all, it was the words of the recipe text which had to stimulate the sensory imagination. The compositional pattern with dynamic diagonals and expressive cropping, coming into use in the 1930s, however, activated viewers to move beyond the frame and imagine the photograph's 'off.' Eventually, the introduction of color photography was quintessential to capture the haptic qualities of food, which was brought to the fore even more in extreme close-up shots. These options for stimulating synaesthetic perception largely contributed to turning the photograph into an essential component of the recipe and the cookbook.

These sensual recipe pictures do not just illustrate a recipe, prefiguring for potential users what the result of a cooking effort should look like, but draw viewers into the sensory world, which the cookbook conjures with its particular style and choice of recipes. In an instant, recipe pictures can establish a *sensory* relation not only with the book (as an object), but with the food the recipes envision. As port of access, recipe photographs have become indispensable for the cookbook of the past 50 years.[36] The photograph section in *Paul Bocuse's French Cooking*, if very brief and

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35 Inside the 'gustative image,' Boutaud (2012: 87–88, 2016: 206) distinguishes three interacting levels: the image of the flavor (*saveur*), which is his truly innovative category; the image of the food object (*aliment*); the image of the context (*scène alimentaire*).

36 It might be added that some cookbooks deliberately opt for line drawings (Irma Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking* being a notable case [Mendelson 2003: 204–208, 268–270]), which connect the viewer to the food less through the evocation of its sensual properties, but by offering an –

relegated to the end of the book, is therefore instrumental in inviting reader-viewers into the world of the chef's *nouvelle cuisine*. Whether reader-viewers eventually switch to 'using' the recipes, has become more and more secondary, owing to the pictures' conveyance of multiple sensory registers tied to a dish thereby creating a self-sufficient experience. As we have seen, Bocuse ascribed his cookbook a double function: to be read as culinary literature (and, I would add: to be viewed as a photobook) and to be used as a set of cooking instructions. Some recent publications strive to go one step further and pretend that the cookbook can do its work without any 'bla bla.' The distribution of colors and surface textures, as offered by their new food photography constitutes a visual spectacle of its own kind. It remains to be discussed then, whether the sensual experience of recipe pictures remains unconditionally bound to the sensual experience of the food or whether they have already managed to create an aesthetic sphere of their own.

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