

Food as a Medium Between Art and Cuisine

Rirkrit Tiravanija's Gastronomic Installations

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2

In an early solo project at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, conceptual artist Rirkrit Tiravanija served up the eponymous dish for *Untitled 1990 (Pad thai)*. For this purpose he used cooking and food as the medium and thus called into question generally accepted concepts of art. Not all the visitors actually realized the action was a form of art, with some assuming that it was simply a catering service.¹ The installation *DO WE DREAM UNDER THE SAME SKY*² at Art Basel 2015 also revolved around gastronomy and provided hundreds of guests with food every day of the art fair.

As a chef and graduate of the Curatorial Studies master program at the Städelschule and the Goethe University in Frankfurt, I am interested in the practices and discourses surrounding the interweaving of art and cuisine. In order to better understand Tiravanija's aesthetic practice, I took part in his *DWDUTSS* project at Art Basel 2015. As a conceptual artist, Tiravanija

¹ | Grassi/Tiravanija: 2007, p. 5.

² | Subsequently abbreviated to "*DWDUTSS*".

uses food quite naturally as a medium that conveys far more than just a flavor. The culinary execution of his dishes is less important here; if we assume cuisine aims at artisanal perfection, the food he serves is not of outstanding quality. Looking beyond this criterion, however, the specific artistic potential that cooking harbors in Tiravanija's aesthetic practice is something I aim to examine using this installation as a starting point.

In order to better define Tiravanija's art, the so-called *relational aesthetics* of Nicolas Bourriaud offer an important, widely-used methodology. However, Bourriaud uses the specified term exclusively with regard to the socializing dimension of a shared meal. What is meant here are the social bonds that develop between people who participate in a meal set up by Tiravanija. Nevertheless, with an eye on the use of food as a medium, gastronomic knowledge of the culture and traditions of the dishes Tiravanija serves is fundamental for the understanding of his work. The artist goes beyond social and satiating aspects in his use of food and through this medium articulates his own attitude, which is reflected in the examination of cultural identities in increasingly globalized contexts. A reference to gastronomy emerges beyond this in structural terms as well: With *DWDUTSS*, Tiravanija becomes an art-caterer, who distributes his now famous Thai curries as a "signature dish" each day to hundreds of visitors in Basel, adopting strategies of gastronomic entrepreneurs. The following sections begin with an examination of Tiravanija's installation in Basel with the aim of subsequently examining Nicolas Bourriaud's theory, which might explain at last partly the sense in which Tiravanija's culinary actions can be understood as manifestations of a relevant artistic way of working. In order to ultimately demonstrate what *Relational Aesthetics* are not able to achieve, I refer to some of Tiravanija's earlier works. These aim to make clear what I believe is an essential point, namely the importance of specifically gastronomic knowledge for the understanding of Tiravanija's works. Finally I trace Tiravanija's proximity to gastronomic enterprises, which becomes clear through the work *DWDUTSS*.

DO WE DREAM UNDER THE SAME SKY, ART BASEL 2015

What first strikes visitors to the exhibition site is the huge roof structure made of steel and bamboo, which covers an open kitchen and a few tables intended as a place for discussion. Here there is a clear association with bamboo as a Thai building material which, with its steel reinforcement, evokes certain impressions of *the land*. The site-specific installation is not a stand-alone piece, but rather points to another project with utopian potential: *The land* refers to a rice field (as conveyed by the Thai name) near Chiang Mai. The initiators Kamin Lerdchaiprasert and Rirkrit Tiravanija acquired a piece of land there, which is worked as a rice field by local farmers and at the same time is intended to serve as a place of retreat and a meeting point for artists and students. *The land* aims to facilitate a

life independent of the western economic model. In simple huts built by artists, the site offers interested parties a place to stay aside from the art world.

Beneath the roof of the Basel installation are workstations where people cook, prepare and wash up, as well as several herb gardens. The small elements for the cooking were largely imported directly from Thailand and supplemented with gas and solar cookers. The entire area is designed to be barrier-free, and visitors can wander around beneath the roof structure. The roof is a striking design element, but at the same time it preserves the openness of the space. This way visitors are invited to discover what goes on here. Tiravanija himself is right at the heart of it, cooking and distributing free food. He is assisted in the kitchen by chef Antto Melasniemi, and by students who on a daily base help cooking on site, taking care of food supplies and organizing rounds of discussion. Tiravanija sees the project as an opportunity for exchange on topics such as sustainable nutrition. The exchange sometimes takes the form of a workshop in which participants develop something and share it with others. The artist is very clear that the food on offer is not to be seen as a gastronomic service, but rather as a hospitable gesture with the request that guests wash their crockery themselves after eating. The socializing power of food becomes immediately apparent – as soon as a dish is given out long queues form, firstly in front of the curry pots and subsequently in front of the washing basins. Most of the visitors are very willing to wash their plates themselves, and the long lines of people become a sculptural component of the installation.

In all of this, the food itself is a central element, not only for hungry passers-by, but specifically as a symbolic gesture to welcome visitors. As far as the dishes are concerned, the basic recipes for Pad Thai or Thai curries are varied according to the availability of products no longer suitable for sale, which are organized through food-sharing projects. Thus the action picks up on current trends of our food culture oriented particularly towards awareness of our food consumption. Alongside Thai curry there is also tea, which is prepared using the herbs from the beds, as well as *Nam Pla Eiskrem*, an ice cream made with Asian fish sauce.

DWDUTSS becomes a central meeting point thanks to food. What is extraordinary here is not so much the dishes, but rather the situation in which the many anonymous visitors meet and strike up conversations. With an eye to the traditional understanding of art, this performative, ephemeral cookery action breaks with preconceptions of art linked to the autonomous object and advances the ideas of the avant-garde movement of the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as the *Institutional Critique*. Yet aside from these influences, Tiravanija has also become known for cooking Thai dishes for visitors who gather in the social situation thus created. The leading theorist of this interpretation of his works is Nicolas Bourriaud, whose *Relational Aesthetics* established Tiravanija as a culinary artist.

THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE *RELATIONAL AESTHETICS* AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL FOR TIRAVANIJA'S ART

In his theory of *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud emphasizes the possibility of creating a social moment through food. In summary, Bourriaud proposes the following concept:

While the virtualization of everyday life has regressive effects on the development and the maintenance of "genuine" interpersonal relationships, the convivial nature of a shared meal in a museum or in other art institutions represents a socializing counterweight. The fact that the recipients become active participants and thus part of the artistic work themselves means that the developing contacts seem actually to be the result of the work. For Bourriaud, the fundamental aspect of relational art here lies in bringing people together in a social situation that is initiated and staged by the artist. How this gathering is achieved and under what circumstances people are brought together here plays a subordinate role for Bourriaud, which is why he is able to group together various artists under this aspect despite their works all being very different.³ He thus highlights a new aspect of Tiravanija's work. The social power of a shared meal is a phenomenon that is culturally emblematic in the way it is anchored, but which has previously been little noted as an aesthetic practice. From the symposiums of the Greeks to the Last Supper and from business lunches to dining clubs and modern political banquets, meal-time gatherings are a powerful symbol of human togetherness.⁴ Sociologists confirm the importance of shared meals at which, for example, we learn and practice skills within the family from an early age.⁵ These days, the loss of this time spent together is much lamented.⁶ In art and cuisine the focus lies on the traditions of food and the presentation of the dish on the plate, as well as the improvement of the taste, whereby the shared meal was previously granted scarce attention as a naturally given constant. It is only in more recent times that chefs have once again looked to various contexts of the eating situation and attempted to use this for a particular dining experience.⁷ In parallel to this, Bourriaud sees Tiravanija's practice as a counter-proposal to the information society, which is increasingly isolating people. He offers the example of the automation of everyday services such as a morning alarm or a cash machine.⁸ Hence the

3 | See Bourriaud's explanation: "Aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt." Bourriaud: 2002, p. 112. Alongside Rirkrit Tiravanija, Bourriaud also cites, among others, Liam Gillick, Pierre Huyghe, Felix Gonzales Torres, and Douglas Gordon.

4 | Därmann/Lemke: 2007.

5 | Simmel: 1957; Elias: 1969.

6 | Hauschild: 2014. The problem is also examined by family therapists: See Juul: 2015.

7 | Spence/Piqueras-Fizman: 2014a.

8 | Bourriaud: 2002, p. 17.

creation of situations experienced together only gains aesthetic meaning because this togetherness is increasingly missing from our everyday lives.

In art-historical terms, Bourriaud's approach differs from earlier art theories which see a reference to a desirable but non-existent utopia in an artistic work. Bourriaud maintains: "It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows."⁹ In line with this, artists now act differently: "[...] the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real [...]."¹⁰ Bourriaud refers to the creation of this essential situation that results in exchange between strangers as "micro-utopias",¹¹ which take place in the here and now.

Bourriaud's perspective became a much-discussed art theory during the 1990s, specifically because he carved out a clearly tangible aspect from the apparently heterogeneous body of contemporary art and thus brought together a group of artists and made them explicable using one key term. Nevertheless Bourriaud runs the risk of reducing the artistic positions subsumed under the term of Relational Aesthetics to their relational aspect and thus diverting attention from other relevant contents.

DIY UTOPIA

From today's perspective it appears that Bourriaud recognized a trend in contemporary art relatively early on, which expanded to various aspects of life: Micro-utopias created both through and with a DIY aesthetic, as is the case with Tiravanija, can now be found fairly frequently.¹² The phenomenon of retreat into trusted, compartmentalized structures known as *cocooning* was identified by the media as a trend reversal, particularly following the attacks in New York in 2001: From a hedonistic society to homely contemplation, which is also seen as the return of Biedermeier.¹³ Magazines offer instructions on how to make all sorts of homely items yourself. Whilst more

⁹ | Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰ | Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹ | Ibid., p. 70.

¹² | See Friedrichs, J. (2015): Die Welt ist mir zu viel, in: *Zeit Magazin*, Jan. 8, available online at: <http://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2015/01/entschleunigung-biedermeier-handarbeit-stressabbau> (accessed on Jan. 28, 2016) as well as Sievers, A.-C. (2015): Ich baue also bin ich, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Aug. 9, available online at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/stil/drinnen-draussen/warum-die-deutschen-im-do-it-yourself-fieber-sind-13740354-p3.html> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2016).

¹³ | Christmann, H. (2001): Rückkehr des Biedermeier, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nov. 6, available online at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/gesellschaft-rueckkehr-des-biedermeier-138495.html> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2016).

and more foods are being produced industrially, this trend is prevalent in the area of food production and preparation: Cooking, baking, gardening and brewing are all very popular activities among people aged 30 to 50. As described, Bourriaud interprets the focus on interpersonal relationships in art as a counter-reaction to the digital world without real contacts. Similar to this is the individual DIY principle against mass production and automation. Paradoxically, exchange on this primarily takes place in virtual form. Images of food are staged specifically to balance out the lack of the multisensory experience through visual stimulation.¹⁴

The DIY aspect therefore functions as a claim of the self against anonymous large-scale production, as a gesture of freedom against the presets and adaptations to a thoroughly rationalized world. This is distantly reminiscent of the approach proclaimed by Joseph Beuys in the sense of *social sculpture*, helping to shape society actively as an individual – although this now takes place, counter to Beuys' intention, largely apolitically.¹⁵ Perhaps neither Bourriaud nor Tiravanija intended this, yet there are remarkable parallels to Bourriaud's hypothesis of micro-utopias. The fact that these take place in everyday life is only consistent given the connection between art and life as an aspect of many relational works. Yet if one assumes that Tiravanija's works are merely about eating together, then they would be "[...] unfathomably trivial and banal – in both a political and an aesthetic regard", as Juliane Rebentisch states.¹⁶ The phenomenon described above makes it clear that actually artists are no longer needed as these sorts of micro-utopias are actually realized without their help.¹⁷ Rebentisch offers a differentiated interpretation that addresses the specific dish served:

"[...] for him [Tiravanija], it was about making visible the factual particularity of a western art world establishing itself as universal by means of that which it

14 | See "Essen und Trinken auf Pinterest", *Pinterest* website, available online at: https://de.pinterest.com/categories/food_drink/ (accessed on Feb. 5, 2016).

15 | In keeping with Tiravanija's actions, shared meals also fall within the context of the trend of food festivals and markets, whereby the family unit is replaced by eating with friends. The theory that eating could replace the ubiquitous and much discussed phenomenon of art as a subject of discussion has also already been suggested, see Deresiewicz, W. (2012): A Matter of Taste?, in: *New York Times*, Oct. 26, available online at: http://nytimes.com/2012/10/28/opinion/sunday/how-food-replaced-art-as-high-culture.html?_r=0 (accessed on Feb. 5, 2016). On the topic of food festivals and markets, see also *Le Fooding* website, available online at: <http://lefooding.com/> (accessed on Feb. 5, 2016) as well as the website of *Markthalle Neun*, available online at: <https://markthalleneun.de/> (accessed on Feb. 5, 2016).

16 | Rebentisch: 2013, p. 68.

17 | An initial connection between gastrosophic and utopian ideas exists through Charles Courier, who helped to shape both concepts, on this see also Denker: 2015, p. 287.

excluded: What was served – hence also tellingly the title of the series of these actions – was Pad Thai.”¹⁸

If one pursues this approach further, then one could formulate the idea that Tiravanija’s actions can only be comprehended in their complexity if food is to be observed more precisely as a medium, since certain aspects are articulated through it that Bourriaud’s theory cannot take into account as he leaves out culinary details for his argumentation.

GASTRONOMIC DECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IMAGES OF THE SELF AND OTHERS

With an eye on cooking as a cultural practice and on the foods used and the dishes cooked, which come from a specific context, further interpretations are possible based on the notion of food as a medium. Alongside the significance of food as a medium in general, which appears in Tiravanija’s work as a link to the historical and contemporary avant-garde, including *Fluxus* and *Institutional Critique*, and which was interpreted by Bourriaud as relational art, there is a second level that opens up through the use of the medium of food as a culturally defined symbol-bearer, which Tiravanija applies deliberately. In Bourriaud’s terms a pizza can be used in precisely such a community-forming way as a burger or a kebab, yet in his exhibition Tiravanija deliberately served Pad Thai. Something that played no role at all in Bourriaud’s argumentation is, in my opinion, key to Tiravanija’s work.¹⁹ Using examples of earlier works, in the following I will demonstrate how Tiravanija uses the specifically served dishes to convey messages that can only be appreciated through knowledge of gastronomy.

THE OWN IS THE ALIEN: PAD THAI AND THAI CURRY

Untitled 1990 (Pad thai) at the Paula Allen Gallery was Tiravanija’s first solo exhibition in New York. Even in this initial cookery action, the type of dish was key to the understanding of the work; by no means was it merely about using food simply for its general socializing function. Tiravanija has Thai roots but was born in Argentina, initially studied in Canada and then came to the USA. The question of one’s own identity is one that is very personal

18 | Rebentisch: 2013, p. 68.

19 | There was most likely no intention of examining food and cooking with the Relational Aesthetics, but Bourriaud seems to be thoroughly interested in this theme, as the exhibition *Cookbook* (Oct. 18, 2013 – Jan. 9, 2014) at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Paris proves. He is represented in the exhibition catalogue for *Arts and Foods* with a text about cooking in art and cuisine (first published in the catalogue for *Cookbook*). See: Bourriaud: 2015, pp. 860–71.

and is part of his artistic practice.²⁰ The irritation of a traditional understanding of art through food culminates in the fact that the dish served is Pad Thai, i.e. here the alien element is not only that we are not looking at an object as a work of art, but we are also eating a foreign dish – the food itself is alien. Tiravanija is an outsider in the American art system, and this is reflected in the dish: “[...] Thai food wasn’t something that everyone had experienced. It was still something on the edge, something exotic perhaps; it definitely challenged your normal sense of food.”²¹

The fact that Tiravanija serves Pad Thai as a reference to his own heritage may be a banal observation and not necessarily evidence of the use of the dish as a medium. A closer look at this “typical” Thai dish also complicates the correlation between the dish served and personal identity. Tiravanija is Thai in terms of his nationality, but as far as his cultural identity is concerned, he has close links with other cultures.²² This complexity in determining an identity is reflected in the Thai “national dish”, Pad Thai: The dish originally came from China and was only proclaimed the national dish in 1940 by Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram or indeed Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram – Phibun for short – in order to strengthen the identity and establish a western orientation in the young Thai state, which was founded in 1939 and was previously known as Siam.²³ The dish is prepared using a special rice noodle, the use of which was supposed to support local farmers.²⁴ Historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger talk about this as “invented traditions” which, as the example of Pad Thai shows, are used deliberately in order to strengthen the feeling of national belonging.²⁵ Hence national dishes function as idealized, identity-forming self-images.²⁶ To prepare the dish, Tiravanija used a *West Bend* brand electric wok. In this way he references a work by Martha Rosler, which focuses on the relationship between the USA and China and involves a wok by this brand in the video work *The East is Red, The West is Bending* (1977).²⁷

20 | Grassi/Tiravanija: 2007, p. 4.

21 | Interview with Tiravanija: Birnbaum: 2015, p. 163.

22 | For the exhibition *Traffic* in 1996 in Bordeaux Tiravanija exhibited his passports and visa. See Krause-Wahl: 2006, p. 156. He is continually concerned with travel and travel regulations, see Obrist: 2010, p. 32 as well as Kellein: 2010, p. 11.

23 | Greeley: 2009, p. 78–82.

24 | Ibid.

25 | Hobsbawm: 2012, p. 1.

26 | Barlösius: 1999, p. 154. The fact that this ideal can also topple is demonstrated by defamations of citizens of individual nations as *spaghetti-eaters*, *frog-eaters* or *krauts*.

27 | See “Martha Rosler *The East is Red, The West is Bending* 1977”, *Moma* website, available online at: <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/159791?loca=pt> (accessed on Jan. 28, 2016) as well as Kellein: 2010, p. 14. With the work *Semiotics of the kitchen* (1975), Rosler had previously examined feminist

Going beyond the dish's particular history, Tiravanija also added subtle variations to a very typical Thai curry and thus deliberately examined its function as a cultural symbol. In the 303 Gallery he served two different versions of the dish for *Untitled 1992 (free)*: an "authentic" version with imported ingredients as well as a New York version with ingredients from the USA and less spice,²⁸ whereby there is a focus on the assimilation and integration of other cultures as well as the approach to what is one's own and what is foreign. The two abovementioned dishes, which he later replaced with foods primarily associated with local contexts, make it clear that for Tiravanija, food as a medium has never had merely a socializing function even from the beginning, but rather raises questions of identity and belonging in increasingly globalized contexts.

BEYOND CURRY

Taking the early works as a basis, for the Venice Biennale 1993 Tiravanija ultimately tackled the identity of an entire nation. His installation *Untitled (1271)* consisted of cooking pots in a canoe, which point to Native Americans, and at the same time is reminiscent of the floating markets in Thailand. In the installation, visitors were able to prepare noodle soup for themselves. The *Cup O Noodles* provided for this work are a ready-made product from Japanese firm Nissin, but they are produced in the USA.²⁹ The number 1271 in the title points to the year in which Marco Polo is thought to have imported noodles from China to Italy. The reference to the myth of the noodle importation also links Asian and western traditions, in this case even the local story of Venetian Marco Polo and the Italian pasta tradition with the cultural history of China. Identity is once again interpreted as a complex construct which can be highlighted using food as a medium. As in many of Tiravanija's other works, global lines of connection play an important role. Alongside this historic interpretation, the instant dish is also relevant on a sociological level. As a one-person dish it is symbolic of a time-saving single meal and is in contrast to the large curry pots from which the artist otherwise distributes food in order to encourage strangers to gather for a family meal. The fact that the visitors can consume the product alone, just as this single-serving ready meal implies, and can thus remain isolated in spite of participating in the artwork, makes it clear that his installation does not force interpersonal exchange, but rather deliberately allows it to occur. The addressed circulation of goods, but also of people through tourism and in a more elementary way through migration,

perspectives using the sphere of the kitchen. The connotation of cooking as a female activity contrasts with the dominance of male actors as chefs in art and gastronomy that becomes clear in this work.

28 | Krause-Wahl: 2006, p. 142.

29 | Obrist: 2010, p. 12.

which ultimately determines one's own identity, remained important for the works that followed too.

As part of the preparation for the group exhibition *Backstage* (1993) at Hamburg's Kunstverein, in his work *Untitled 1993 (flädle-suppe)* Tiravanija served a typical German soup, or more precisely a Swabian specialty that is no less alien to a resident of Hamburg than a Thai curry. Here the soup was prepared by a foreigner resident in Germany as a symbol of his willingness to integrate. As part of the installation there was also a screening of the film *Drachenfutter*, which is set in Hamburg and in which one character says: "You have to cook Flädlesuppe if you want to be German."³⁰ In the film an asylum-seeking Chinese waiter befriends a Pakistani who is a chef in a Chinese restaurant and together they follow their dream of opening their own restaurant.

In keeping with the exhibition title *Backstage*, Tiravanija's soup was cooked and served for participants in the loading area before the opening, so the visitors saw only the remains of this action, which form an exhibit. The fact that Tiravanija prepared the soup using ready-made products here is more than just a gastronomic detail. Preparing Flädlesuppe using a ready-mix for pancakes and stock powder, plus the addition of a little cayenne pepper, clearly contradicts the traditional recipe and probably also the general expectations of the soup's taste.³¹ The perceptions of integration that are supposed to be manifested through the cooking of a typically German soup, which is nevertheless perceived as such only by the Swabian part of Germany, were thus broken ironically multiple times over. With this location-specific installation, Tiravanija addressed the perception of foreign identities on several levels: He evaded the expectation both that he will give out free food and also that he always serves only "exotic" dishes.

The artist followed a similar strategy around ten years later: For *Untitled 2003 (social pudding)* at the *Zeitgenössische Galerie Leipzig*, Tiravanija teamed up with the Danish art group *Superflex* to serve pudding. This was produced from the ready-made pack that is very recognizable in Germany, which was designed specially for this exhibition based on the products of a large German manufacturer.³² Even today the great-grandson of the company's founder Arend Oetker is still the Chairman of the Board for the exhibition venue's foundation. Here Tiravanija was once again reacting to the circumstances in situ. The coconut and orange flavor prepared for the exhibition nevertheless pointed once again to his own heritage: Orange

30 | *Drachenfutter*, Jan Schütte, D 1987. See Probst, C. (2010): Globale Koch-Kunst in Bielefeld, *Deutschlandfunk.de*, Nov. 11, available online at: http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/globale-koch-kunst-in-bielefeld.691.de.html?dram:article_id=54398 (accessed on Feb. 5, 2016).

31 | See Trippi: 1998, as well as Kellein: 2010, p. 12.

32 | *Superflex* website "Social Pudding," available online at: http://superflex.net/tools/social_pudding//4#g (accessed on Jan. 23, 2016).

as the color of Buddhism is a recurring color in his works, whilst coconut milk is a basic ingredient of his Thai curries.³³

The works mentioned here demonstrate that Tiravanija's gastronomic installations cannot be reduced down to the mere serving of Thai specialties. Using food as a medium, he returns time and again to various aspects: Social, topographic, cultural and historic. In addition, he addresses the role of the chef, the prepared dish and the ingredients used in the process. Thus it becomes clear that using food as a medium he explores the circumstances encountered and integrates these into the work. What is unique about Tiravanija's works is that, as a conceptual artist, he also integrates gastronomic knowledge into his works and likewise gives artisanal qualities a certain meaning. So how does this relate to the work developed in 2015, *DO WE DREAM UNDER THE SAME SKY?*

FROM MEDIUM TO BRAND

In comparison to earlier works, with *DWDUTSS* it appears that gastronomic knowledge actually comes to the fore somewhat less. Against the background of Tiravanija's formerly intensive examination of food as a medium, only a superficial indication of earlier works is inherent in the Thai-inspired food given out as part of this work. In Basel Tiravanija presents himself as a well-known artist-chef, whose curry dishes are long since established as a brand within the art world. Instead of using food as a medium through gastronomic knowledge, the artist takes the role of a gastronomic service provider. Alongside the architecture of steel and bamboo, Thai curry becomes an exoticized representation of *the land*.

With an eye on Tiravanija's earlier works, the philosopher Harald Lemke identifies: "Tiravanija's intercultural 'gastrosophy' circumvents the problem of a conceptual traditionalism and ethnocentrism, which naturalize and exoticize the cultures to an immutable identity by deliberately highlighting the real artificial nature of the food-cultural identity."³⁴ For *DWDUTSS* however, other parameters that contradict these observations nevertheless appear central. After all, the attempt to create a Thai ambiance follows the logic of tourist exhibition stands that are supposed to bring the flair of a travel destination to life. Here *DWDUTSS* shows parallels to the Milan Expo 2015, which took place at the same time and for which various countries presented their typical dishes under the motto *Feeding*

33 | Krause-Wahl: 2006, p. 168.

34 | Lemke: 2007, p. 96. A description of the work in the Grand Palais likewise defends Tiravanija's work *Soup/No Soup* against the accusation of exoticizing: "En outre, bien que Tiravanija privilégie les recettes thaï dans ses repas, il évite les associations simplificatrices de l'exotisme, soulignant plutôt les dimensions intangibles et interpersonnelles de l'expérience partagée." See: *Grand Palais* website "Rirkrit Tiravanija, Soup/No Soup", available online at: <http://www.grandpalais.fr/fr/evenement/rirkrit-tiravanija-soupno-soup> (accessed on Jan. 30, 2016).

the Planet, Energy for life (May 1 to October 10, 2015). This is problematic not only because it serves certain clichéd preconceptions. The practice is in contrast to Tiravanija's earlier way of working, which always called existing preconceptions into question and highlighted over-simplification. It is true that food continues to serve Tiravanija as a medium that is bound up with the question of identity, yet this is not a central theme nor critically examined here, rather only banal associations are prompted. Food becomes an enhancement of the installation for *Greetings from Thailand*, but to Bourriaud's mind it at least serves as a medium for bringing people together in a specific place and social situation.

This gathering in front of the art exhibition has event potential. As far as Diedrich Diederichsen is concerned certainly: "[...] Participation is the new spectacle",³⁵ even if the exhibition, with its high sales and visitor numbers, is perhaps the greater spectacle. As a primarily economically defined venue it offers a framework that unavoidably twists Tiravanija's practice entirely. Even visitors who are familiar with neither the artist nor his work and who have a traditional understanding of the museum as an institution are far less confused by eating and cooking in front of an art exhibition than in the middle of a museum or a gallery. Having a meal here is not seen as a surprising intervention, but rather as a service offering. The installation thus shifts more clearly towards gastronomy than Tiravanija's previous works. In previous works detailed gastronomic knowledge made food a medium, whilst now it is much more structural references to gastronomy that come to the fore.

THE ARTIST AS A CHEF³⁶

Contrary to expectations, here the overlaps between art and gastronomy do not lie primarily in the fulfilment of culinary desires on the part of the guests, as the concept of *service art* coined by Christian Janecke would imply, but specifically in the negation of these desires.³⁷ As a gastronomic installation *DWDUTSS* aims to evade the service nature of regular exhibition gastronomies, but at the same time highlights astonishing similarities with the restaurants of top chefs. These venues are now seen as places that not only serve good food, but also aim to offer a comprehensive experience. As such autonomous places for experience, like Tiravanija's installation they detach themselves from conventional service gastronomy. This effort towards autonomy includes serving a tasting menu as the highest expres-

35 | Diedrich Diederichsen quotes from Rebentisch: 2013, p. 64.

36 | See Krause-Wahl: 2006, p. 166 and Beil: 2002, p. 219. Whilst Beil calls Joseph Beuys a chef, Krause-Wahl highlights Tiravanija's leadership qualities in comparison to managers. Here I connect these two perspectives.

37 | See Janecke: 2011 and his "Partizipationsfolklore" ["Participation Folklore"], *Faust Kultur* website, April 2015, available online at: <http://faustkultur.de/2236-0-Maschen-der-Kunst-Partizipationsfolklore.html> (accessed on Jan. 23, 2016).

sion of culinary art. This is generally offered as the only possible option, so there are no à la carte dishes. The guest has to embrace a menu created by the chef. This is for pragmatic reasons on the one hand, because the dishes served are complex and are easier to create with a standard menu. On the other hand, the chef as the author of the menu is given the opportunity to steer the culinary experience entirely. These kinds of restaurants are sometimes booked out months in advance, and part of the overall experience is only getting a reservation with a bit of luck. This scarcity enhances the restaurant's attractiveness.

DWDUTSS also avoids a varied culinary offering. Here guests eat whatever is placed on the table. Food is cooked and then distributed for as long as it remains. Due to the high demand and limited quantities, in Basel too there is likewise a scarcity of the coveted food. What is more, the visitors can continually follow the cooking process and look over the shoulders of the chefs at their workstations as they prepare the food. An open kitchen or visits to the kitchen are another element of many top restaurants, which give the curious guests insights into the site of production.³⁸ The herb beds of *DWDUTSS* also suggest local production and the direct link to *the land* points towards close contact with the producers of foodstuffs,³⁹ similarly to premium restaurants that cultivate their own vegetable gardens.⁴⁰ Something that is a fundamental element of the concept in top restaurants is at least visually proclaimed by means of design considerations in fashionable locales, where pots of basil on tables, a visible service station and relatively stereotypical elements of interior design such as ceramic tiles or wooden bars are enough to convey craftsmanship and authentic food in a systematically thought out and relatively mechanically functioning establishment.

Similarly to the strong presence of the head chef in his own restaurant, always appreciated by guests, for *DWDUTSS* Tiravanija plays a greater role at the center of his own work than he otherwise would. Generally his presence in the gallery or museum space has been seen as non-essential for the relevance of his works, argues art historian Jacqueline Burckhardt: "The personal presence of the artist does not play a role in the experience of his art."⁴¹ At the art fair, however, his presence takes on a different significance: Here Tiravanija is in demand as a star of art and cuisine, as the following press report suggests: "The food was ready. And, having tried it, I can say this: brave the lines and try Rirkrit's curry. If you're lucky, maybe

38 | Adrià/Soler/Adrià: 2008, p. 341.

39 | The artist as a farmer was a theme as early as 2013, see: Art Basel: Art Basel Conversations: The Artist as Farmer, available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxUQK31oWVk> (accessed on Oct. 20, 2015).

40 | In the cookbooks of famous kitchens the producers used are not only mentioned but also illustrated and presented in detail. See: Redzepi: 2010, pp. 346; Keller: 1999, pages 28, 122, 194, and 248.

41 | Burckhardt: 1998, p. 230.

he'll ladle it into your bowl himself."⁴² Through his presence, the artist as caterer to the art world attracts an audience that is "programmed" to artistic authorship.

THE AESTHETICS OF FOOD

The gradual approach to gastronomic undertakings, which was slowly taking shape back in 2001 at the Venice Biennale, where Tiravanija teamed up with artists Tobias Rehberger and Olafur Eliasson to run a temporary restaurant, reached one of its high points at Art Basel 2015. The road towards a restaurant of his own did not seem far away and indeed the artist opened his first restaurant in summer 2015. Tiravanija's gallery-owner Gavin Brown sees this as a logical step: "It's the first time he's had a commercial kitchen, so it's a departure in that sense, [...]. It's a natural progression, in a way. It's about entering into the same place but from a different direction."⁴³

Chefs, for their part, are discovering the potential of using food as an art medium. Chef Ferran Adrià's invitation to documenta in 2007 established just such an understanding of cooking in art. Adrià sees cooking as a language: "Cooking is a language through which all the following properties may be expressed: harmony, creativity, happiness, beauty, poetry, complexity, magic, humor, provocation and culture."⁴⁴

In both cases the artisanal activity, conceptual thinking and aesthetic medium all complement one another. Chefs and artists who use food as a medium thus operate together in an area of congruency between art and cuisine. The analysis of this practice requires both gastronomic and art-historical knowledge in order to grasp the works in their various aspects. Hence food as a medium can be understood both in art and in cuisine as no longer solely of a culinary function and significance, but rather must be confronted with various other contexts in order to tap into the significance it holds beyond purely aesthetic parameters.

An aesthetic of food that combines the aesthetic and art-historical approaches with gastronomic knowledge represents a fruitful expansion of a purely culinary perception for the post-Adrià generation of chefs, such as Massimo Bottura, René Redzepi or Andoni Aduriz. These chefs tackle cultural aspects as much as changing taste patterns, even if initially, in contrast to fine artists, they are focused on products, their processing and their presentation.

42 | Freeman, N. (2015): Curry on the Messeplatz: Rirkrit Tiravanija on his much-hyped installation in Basel, June 15, available online at: <http://www.artnews.com/2015/06/15/curry-on-the-messeplatz-rirkrit-tiravanija-on-his-much-hyped-installation-in-basel/> (accessed on Feb. 5, 2016).

43 | Herriman: 2015.

44 | Buerge: 2009, p. 10.

This is less about the question of whether and under what circumstances cooking is an art form, and rather about being able to appropriately place cooking as an aesthetic practice. Chefs ever more frequently cross the threshold between art and cuisine and are thus active within the area of congruency with artists like Tiravanija. With an eye on Adrià and Tiravanija, who both use food as a medium, Adorno's statement that "[...] the emancipation of art from cuisine or pornography is irrevocable" is proven to be a misjudgment.⁴⁵

45 | Adorno: 1997, p. 15.

