

Plating Food

On the Pictorial Arrangement of Cuisine on the Plate

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Referring to a plate as a picture is not necessarily par for the course. It makes sense though, if one assumes that the food arranged on the plate has a display function, or if it represents something, and refers to something more than just itself. What is intended with what I eat, and how is it prepared? What memories and associations does the dish trigger at the moment it is presented? Given the way it was produced, fermented, and put together, in what historical, cultural or transcultural context is it embedded? Whether fast food, slow food, fusion or Haute cuisine: In the way it is chosen and arranged, the food on the plate reveals a certain understanding of culture. It makes statements about aspects such as authenticity and historicity, globalization and regionality, about enjoyment, sustainability and health. It is possible that the representation of food refers to a certain cultural concept or to a particular social discourse, as the plate now makes visible as food what was previously a commodity. The commodities are released from their production and manufacturing context. The picture on the plate, no matter how naturally it is arranged, is no longer nature, agriculture, or sustenance, but food to be enjoyed, presented to me on a plate to be sampled. The plate, astonishingly consistent in terms of its basic design for at least 4,000–5,000 years now, is at the beginning of a cultivation process, which allocates me a portion of the community's (tribe's) limited supply of sustenance. Even today, the food arranged "for me" makes for the magnetic attraction of the plate's appearance. It is frequently given to me by somebody. It is a "gift". The shoulder of the plate forms the framework marking the difference between nature/sustenance and culture/food, so as thereby to make one aware of a quite specific cultural concept. The base of the plate, no matter how shallow, raises the arranged food from the table and at this particular moment makes it an event for me.

Over the past 20 years, visual and pictorial studies have addressed in detail the philosophical, religious, iconic, epistemic and anthropological dimensions of pictures and their impact. The philosophical, creative, political, social, and communicative characteristics of pictures and their significance for creative or architectural drafts was also discussed. To date,

however, there has been no long-term discourse on the iconic characteristics of food and how it is arranged on plates.

“Plating” describes both the preparation and presentation of food on a plate. The primary intention of plating is a visual or sensual attraction, though as a cultural concept it entails far more. If plating is characterized as a certain form of picture, the fact that the look of the plate is highly unstable presents a particular difficulty and is also linked to other sensual experiences such as the sense of touch and smell. If I taste what is on the plate it would appear to be no longer a picture, if I just see it, it appears not to correspond to its actual intention. Although some cooks make drawings when creating their recipes, artistic or creative practices do not appear to be explicitly used in the arranging of food on plates. Top-flight chefs’ artificial plate arrangements in particular combine aesthetic, cultural, culinary and scientific knowledge, which is expressed in the plate’s look. The arrangements on the plate have to stand a visual but also a taste test. They have to be meaningful not just at the very first moment but during the entire process of consuming the food.

MYTHOLOGICAL SPECULATION AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL FICTION

Several years ago Richard Wrangham highlighted the evolutionary significance of cooking meat over a fire, and in doing so triggered a broad discussion of the relationship between cooking and the history of mankind. Cooking, in particular of meat but also of root bulbs, created nutrition with a greater energy value and requiring less physical effort. In terms of energy, the reduced strain on the digestive tract could be used to build up the brain, he stated. As such, the rapid increase in the size of *Homo erectus* and its predecessors approx. 1.6 million years ago went hand in hand with the controlled use of fire for cooking. Put in simpler terms: Cooking, especially of meat over an open fire, first lays the foundations for the evolutionary conditions for the development of the human brain. Fire, cooking, eating are the fundamentals of human incarnation.¹

Although from an anthropological point of view it was argued that the systematic use of fire for cooking is at most 200,000 to 800,000 years old, and as such far younger than the decisive evolutionary stages in the development of the human brain,² and that the close pairing of meat and fire defined early man’s menu too rigidly, “Catching Fire” had a wide social impact.³ Michael Pollan followed on from this and associated a return to

1 | Wrangham: 2009.

2 | Gibbons: 2007.

3 | Organ, C./Nunn, C. L. et al. (2012): Phylogenetic rate shifts in feeding time during the evolution of *Homo*, in: *PNAS*, 108/35, <http://www.pnas.org/content/108/35/14555.full?sid=95c4876b-9870-4259-888f-24a6179be4fc>, last accessed Jan. 31, 2017; McBroom, P. (1999): Meat-eating was essential for human

older cooking techniques with fostering a greater awareness of the “real” significance of them.⁴ As a result among other things old cooking techniques, such as cooking on open fires and gained in popularity again.⁵ As “nose to tail”, “root to leaf” or “local food” a new take on nutrition became popular that not only set itself off from its predecessors (molecular cuisine, nouvelle cuisine), but in an era of digitized, globalized and critical living conditions held out the prospect of, to adapt the phrase by Theodor W. Adorno, a “right life in the wrong one”.

From the point of view of the “Culinary Turn”, Wrangham’s theory about the birth of mankind from the spirit of cooking is interesting in that it reveals that not only are there indications of crucial processes in the development of mankind in specific concepts of cooking and eating, but they were also driven by them. In terms of cultural history “Catching Fire” can also be seen as a rereading of the myth of Prometheus. As is well known, according to Hesiod (“Works and Days”, Book II) and in later versions, Zeus refused mankind fire and proclaimed: “They shall have their meat! But I refuse them fire! They will have to eat their meat raw”. Thereupon, Prometheus brought fire (back) to the people secretly in the form of a fennel stalk (narthex).⁶ Unlike the myth, which are things that “never happened, but always are”⁷, Wrangham makes the plot a fact in the history of mankind. Just as the myth has the character of necessity, and states why things had to turn out that way (even if we will never know why), “Catching Fire” also gives the cooking of meat over fire the character of necessity. In doing so Wrangham narrows down the diversity of the food as well as the cooking techniques. However, it is something different to say: “We all have to eat, but we don’t eat everything we could.”⁸ That is because it is about preferences, the possibility of making a choice, and culinary diversity, which plays a significant role at least in a plate’s appearance. That provides a culinary offering that aims to win one over to a specific conception of nutrition: “Dishes are ... pictures, cooking is creating a world concept (Weltentwurf).”⁹

A model such as the artist Dieter Froelich sketches, which approves of culinary enjoyment and associated diversity, could also offer new perspec-

evolution, says UC Berkeley anthropologist specializing in diet, in: *News Release*, 6/14/99, <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/99legacy/6-14-1999a.html>, last accessed Jan. 31, 2017.

4 | Pollan: 2013, p. 27.

5 | Ekstedt: 2016; Katz: 2012.

6 | In ancient times the core of fennel stalks, whose embers lasted for several hours, even days, was used to transport fire.

7 | Thomas Sedlacek quoting Sallust in Sedlacek, T. (2013): *Economics of Good and Evil. The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*, Oxford, p. 108.

8 | Froelich: 2012, p. 11.

9 | Ibid.

tives from an anthropological point of view. The culinary triangle Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced in 1964, which mapped food in “raw”, “cooked”, and “rotten”, and which also inspired Wrangham’s “Catching Fire”, cannot then be thought of as a model of a linear development from nature (raw) to culture (cooked), in order to rule out decay as a corruption process.

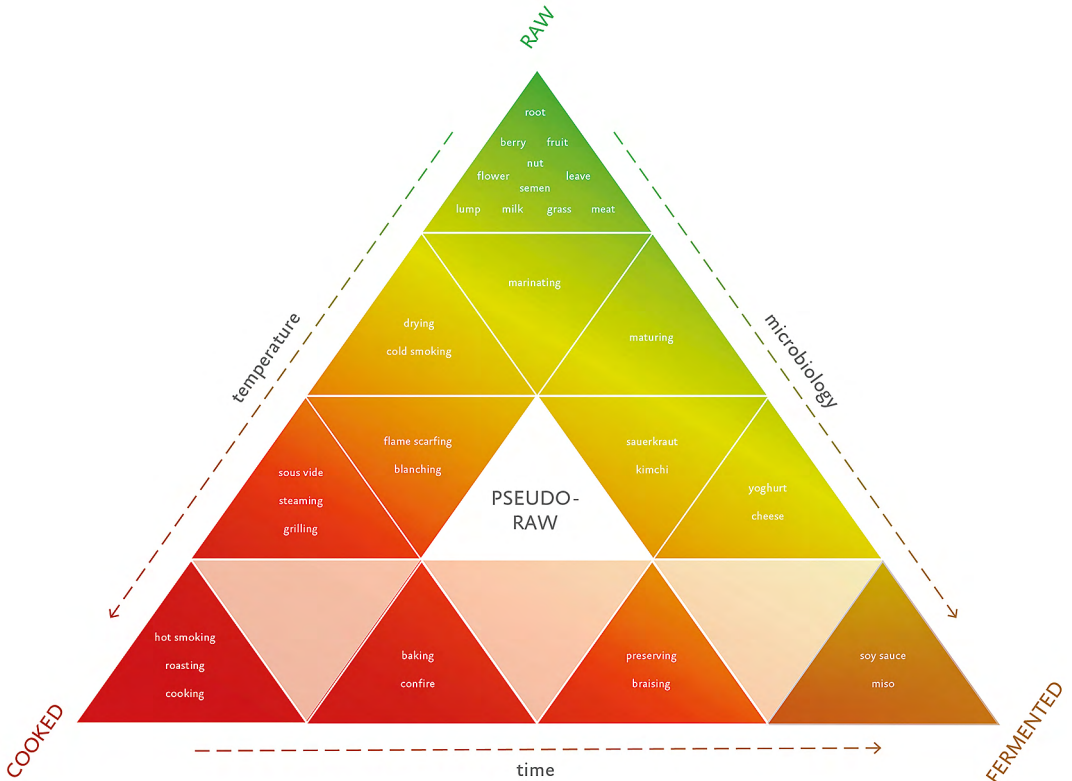


Fig. 1: Proposed advance of Lévi-Strauss’ “triangle culinaire” for the allocation of plate imagery (Vilgis, further developed by NvdM and Isabel Lina Christen)

The culinary triangle provides a model for a more complex, cross-cultural matrix, in which the relationship between nature and culture is changeable depending of the cooking and decay process. Through the basic division of food into raw (*cru*), cooked (*cuit*) and rotten (*pourri*), and the refinement of this model by Thomas A. Vilgis into ‘raw’, ‘cooked’ and ‘fermented’, thus differentiating between the content, not only cultural and culinary forms, but also specific forms of plate imagery can be allocated. An elaborated version of the culinary triangle could also be a starting point for describing the components of a plate beyond their mere name and associate them with culinary and cooking dimensions.

HISTORICAL COMMENTS

However we reconstruct the origins of the human diet, not much imagination is needed to suppose that cooking preceded the plate, while the plate preceded the image of the plate. The more we move towards complex or reflected plate images, the more social and aesthetic dimensions come into play alongside the precision of culinary aspects. Systematic cooking presupposes cooking utensils.¹⁰ Wrangham emphasizes that some animals, for example shellfish, supply the vessel they are cooked in, so to speak, themselves naturally and that from there it is only a short step to cooking receptacles.¹¹ However, this process must have taken place in long, slow steps. The very first pottery is probably 26,000 years old and as such was around 15,000 years ahead of the start of animal husbandry and agriculture.¹²



Fig. 2: Roman Plate: Roman Imperial Period (27 BC - 284 AD),
Museum Frankenthal, Germany

The historical developments from the bowl to individual plates and their relationship to trays for cutting up meals, to ritual offering plates and to joint plates have not yet been traced. One can assume, though, that shallow plates for individuals enabled social changes in terms of the relationship between individual and community, as well as culinary changes in terms of the type, structure, and number of foodstuffs. Furthermore, the shallow plate most probably developed from the bowl and, as opposed to the latter, made it easier to cut up and eat food, and arrange it separately on a plate. An approx. 5,000-year old shallow bowl in the Metropolitan Museum in New York indicates an early morphological relation-

10 | Gremillion: 2011, p. 66.

11 | Wrangham: 2009, p. 124.

12 | See Price, T. D./Bar-Yosef, O. (2011): The Origins of Agriculture: New Data, New Ideas: An Introduction to Supplement 4, in: *Current Anthropology* 52, pp. 163-74.

ship between bowl and plate.¹³ There is an approx. 2,000-year old shallow plate made of molded clay in the Erkenbert Museum in Frankenthal near Mannheim, Germany. Not least of all it reveals how the standardized circular shape of the plate stems from the craft of turning and the circular movements of the hand.

In comparison with eating, little study has been conducted on the significance of the plate and *plating* in terms of cultural history. Art historical studies allow few conclusions, as their mostly iconological or social history thrust makes them little suited to illustrating the aesthetic design conditions for plates themselves and their relationship to cooking techniques.¹⁴ According to initial studies, complex arrangements on plates go back to a development in the modern era. Though plates and arrangements on plates have been in use since Antiquity and were employed, for example, for the *cena* (lunch) in Ancient Rome, for the “banchetto”, and for the multi-course feast (*convivium*), the separate accumulation of food in a receptacle or on a plate prevailed.¹⁵ Not until the 17th and 18th century and the associated first steps towards “Haute cuisine” as there any striking change in the appearance of plates. The patissier and chef Marie-Antoine Carême, who also dabbled in architectural theory, apparently assumed a key role in the development of complex plate arrangements and their spread. Following Antoine Beauvilliers’ major work *L’Art du cuisinier* (1814), in 1828 Carême published *L’Art de la cuisine française*, which together with works such as *Le Pâtissier pittoresque* (1828), created illustrative associations between architectural constructiveness and food arrangements.¹⁶

The historically decisive change can be traced to 1960s and 1970s *nouvelle cuisine*, on which Paul Bocuse was a major influence. A single plate gained in significance over a composition of plates based on a “still life”. The closer links developing at the same time between Japanese (Shizuo Tsuji) and French chefs (Alain Chapel, Paul Bocuse) was of relevance for the arrangement on the plate. Inspired among other things by the traditional Japanese meal ‘kaiseki’,¹⁷ simplicity, seasonality and plate arrangement had since the early 1970s been basic criteria of French *nouvelle cuisine*, and precise plating an important part of cooking.¹⁸

With subsequent *avant-gardes* such as “molecular” (since approx. 1990, Heston Blumenthal, Ferran Adrià) and “Nova Regio” cuisine (since approx. 2003, Stefan Wiesner and René Redzepi), the appearance of the plate has gone in different directions, though a scientific basis involving an aesthetic practice of cooking and plating is fundamental to both.

13 | <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547264>, access: 14.02.2017.

14 | Bendiner: 2004.

15 | Schareika: 2008.

16 | See Trubek: 2000; Spang: 2001; Spence/Piqueras-Fiszman: 2014a.

17 | See Tsuji: 1972; Murata: 2006.

18 | See Halligan: 1990; Yang: 2011.



Fig. 3: Heston Blumenthal:
Macerated Strawberries,
with Black Olive and
Leather Purée, and
Pistachio Scrambled Egg

Whereas molecular cuisine's discursive and semantic references apply implicitly to complex (non-standardized) architecture and to post-modern, heterogeneous structures, Nova Regio refers implicitly to current political, aesthetic, and social discourses on nature, countryside, and agriculture. The quoting of nature that no longer is nature, a solemn gesture by means of blatant instances of movement and color, the gentle irony of the details, the Mannerist exaggeration of contours and the playing with the question of what it is are signatures of a post-modern aesthetic that associates molecular cuisine with postmodernist cinema and architecture.



Fig. 4: René Redzepi:
Little Forest on a Plate

When, on the other hand, Rene Redzepi says “we wanted to have a complete little forest on a plate”, his reference model is nature or landscape, which on the plate is modelled to form an intact micro-landscape, and at a time when in many places landscape is experienced as fragmented: “Landscape fragmentation is the result of transforming large habitat patches into smaller, more isolated fragments of habitat.”¹⁹ On the plate a landscape thought to have been long since lost is modelled and is opened to gustatory experience. Molecular cuisine constructs the way the plate looks, whereas a Nova Regio plate tends to be modelled.

DESIDERATUM: TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Over the past few years applied research studies, in particular relating to experimental psychology, addressed the influence of shape, feel, color, weight, size and orientation of plates and vessels.²⁰ These studies led to a far clearer focus on the influence of specific plate arrangements on our eating behavior. Experimental psychology also drew attention to the fact that the generally neglected element of the plate has a deciding influence on what we eat and how we perceive the taste of food.²¹ More recent studies point to the lack of close cooperation between experimental psychology and aesthetics/visual culture with a view to the better assessment of *plating* criteria.²² The fact that putting food on or in a vessel (plate, dish, tray, board, bowl) is fundamental not only for western cultures is one of the interesting results of experimental psychology.²³ As such one can conclude that apart from pure functionality, *plating* enables an examination, appreciation, and increase in enjoyment of the food. Elsewhere, surveys revealed that a rising diagonal arrangement on consumers’ plates tended to be perceived as positive and attractive.²⁴ As much as findings such as these provide interesting information about standardized eating behavior, they say just as little about the criteria according to which aesthetic innovation and a wealth of diversity occur on plates, and what influence cultural discourse has on the appearance of plates. Neither is ultimately based on consumer behavior alone, but also on aesthetic criteria, cooking techniques, the food elected, and social discourse.

19 | <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/chef-rene-redzepi-of-noma-we-want-ed-to-have-a-complete-little-forest-on-a-plate>, last accessed Feb. 1, 2017; *Landscape fragmentation in Europe*, Joint EEA-FOEN report, EEA Report No 2/2011, p. 9.

20 | See Piqueras-Fiszman/Spence: 2012a/2012b; Piqueras-Fiszman/Harrar/Alcaide et al.: 2011; Harrar/Piqueras-Fiszman/Spence: 2011; Levitsky/Youn: 2004; Marchiori/Corneille/Klein: 2012; Michel et al. 2015; Spence/Michel et al.: 2015.

21 | Spence/Piqueras-Fiszman: 2014a, p. 115.

22 | Spence: 2016.

23 | Spence/Piqueras-Fiszman: 2014a.

24 | Michel et al.: 2015.

In the above-mentioned studies, multi-sensory aspects, in other words the interplay between sight, touch, smell and hearing were not taken into consideration. Other more recent studies examine *plating* from the point of view of chefs and cooking practice. In this context *plating* is regarded as central, although the quality of the menu cannot be reduced to its appearance, and experienced chefs can assess the freshness of the produce, quality of the taste, and the cooking technique without touching the food.²⁵ Contradictions such as these show that the criteria for plate imagery cannot be determined by application-oriented studies alone, but require dialog with the natural sciences, aesthetics, and visual culture. The last two disciplines lack scientific as well as culinary knowledge, making a trans-disciplinary perspective necessary for more accurate findings

IMAGE AND TRACE

No matter how delightful it may be, the appearance of a plate retains its attractive character for a short time only. It is unstable. We can ask ourselves when the appearance of a plate is finished: as soon as it has completed the long process from the initial idea and the drawing up of the recipe, to the cooking stage and ultimately the *plating*, or only when a guest has assimilated what is on the plate? The moment of direct encounter or touch between guest and plate is preceded by a process of constant rapprochement, which on the part of the guest is associated with a growing expectation, while the cooked food assumes its most stable form at the moment of plating before being chewed to pulp in the guest's mouth. Even before becoming visible the smell of the food has laid a track. However, the appearance of the plate is not or not only designed to be just seen, but at the moment it becomes visible triggers a longing that leads to tasting and eating. This is one of the punchlines of the plate's appearance, namely that though it is made to be beholden it is only in the act of being tasted and assimilated that it becomes complete. The appearance of the plate is procedural. It culminates during the course of its deconstruction. With the guest sitting in front of the plate its appearance is soon split into an assimilated, chewed pulp, and a trace the person eating the food leaves behind on the plate. The trace of food is legible as a "surviving presence of remains",²⁶ which subsequently says something about the type of food on the plate and its consumption. No one trace resembles another. A plate's contents that have been assimilated remain an image. Like any trace, it requires interpretation. For this reason it is not enough to read the plate's appearance from the point of view of *plating* (and the preceding recipe), but also from the trace it leaves that has to be interpreted.

25 | See Fernandez, P./Aurouze, B./Guastavino, C. (2015): Plating in gastronomic restaurants: A qualitative exploration of chefs' perception, in: *Menu, Journal of Food and Hospitality Research*, 4, pp. 16.

26 | See Derrida: 1997; Kogge/Krämer/Gruber: 2007.



Fig. 5, 6 and 7:
Tanja Grandits: Fillet of deer,
ginger, quinoa, red cabbage,
blackberry pickle and pea
blossom, 2016 (Appearance
of plate and trace on plate)

The plate displayed here by Tanja Grandits (Restaurant Stucki, Basel/CH) comprises three basic components: deer, quinoa, red cabbage. In addition to which there are smaller elements that extend the aroma complex, such as blackberry pickle and ginger. The way the components are arranged on the plate allows several combinations or what Vilgis terms “projections” on it. The plate’s appearance can be said to be coherent, if gustatory and visual elements produce an overall picture. But how do the gustatory and the visual really reference each other, as they do not really develop in each other? It would be worthwhile interweaving formal aesthetic qualities such as deep/shallow, architectural/organic, concentrated/dispersed with gustatory qualities sweet, sour, salty, bitter, umami in a joint and “thick” (Clifford Geertz) description. Not in the sense of homogenization, but development of the visual through taste. The taste component is not only built into the appearance of the plate, the taste helps shape the appearance. Here, the three parts into which what is on the plate are frequently divided are concentrated or as one. The separation of the elements and the associated opening of the triad would produce an open form and a completely different picture, and also increase the complexity, as the guest is confronted with higher requirements in terms of the combination of the elements. Tanja Grandits’ plate comes with ways of finding one’s way round the plate, for example by the overlapping of quinoa and red cabbage, or by positioning red cabbage and fillet of deer close together. At the same time though the guest is advised to combine several, at least two elements in his mouth at the same time.

The color modulation brown, red, violet, through to black conveys great painterly coherence with appealing warm hues. The proximity of pink pea blossom and blackberry to the guest reduces the dominance of the meat on the plate. To a certain degree the taste modulation breaks up the color unity with a broad spectrum of nuances ranging from sweet (meat, red cabbage, quinoa) to sour (blackberry pickle, ginger, red cabbage). Visual and gustatory modulation do not blend here. In other words: Though taste and aromas are part and parcel of the plate’s contents, the latter do not develop them on an equal basis. We often experience the taste through the contents and from there describe differences and relationships between taste and contents. The food moves from the contents to the taste and melds with the texture.

Like an abstract picture by Kandinsky, which can be viewed several ways, the plate’s appearance shows very accurately that interaction between guest and plate can be very different. The question of whether one prefers to taste components combined or experience them in isolation is pivotal in terms of whether to a certain degree they are “pulled apart” or kept together. The trace on a plate that has been eaten clean reveals whether the emphasis was on isolated or combined consumption of the components.

SCALE PATTERNS (TOGETHER WITH THOMAS A. VILGIS)

At molecular level, dimensions of taste and smell that are relevant for aesthetic perception (and as such for *plating*) become tangible but often cannot be described linguistically. A hypothetical scale enables aesthetic and physiological, as well as taste and visual dimensions of perception to relate to one another.

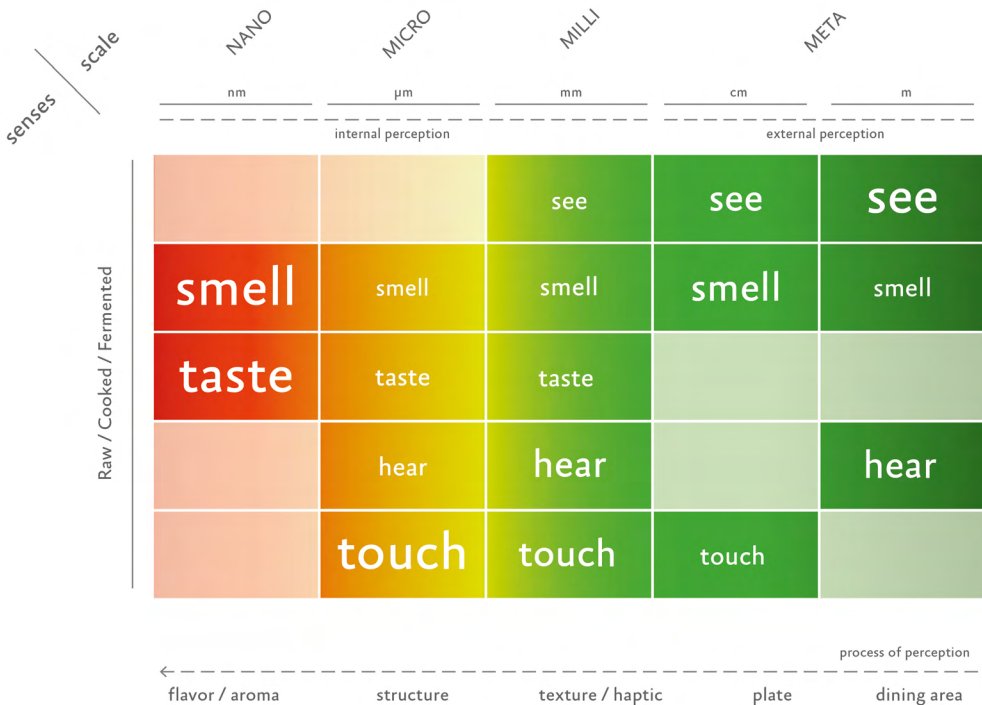


Fig. 8: Hypothetical model of the physiological and aesthetic perception of plate imagery (Vilgis, further developed by NvdM and Isabel Lina Christen)

The perception and consumption of the plate's contents can be thought of in terms of length scales. Taste and aroma, which are perceived by means of taste receptors on the tongue and olfactory cells in the nose reference atomistic scales. Ions and aromatic substances interact with corresponding proteins on the tongue and olfactory bulb. These senses are triggered directly by readings on the scale of typically 1 nanometer. Preparation techniques used in classic as well as avant-garde cuisine take effect in the length scale between 10 and 100 nanometers.

Tactile receptors on the tongue are in a position to detect the smallest of differences, for example in the flow behavior of liquids or in the breakage behavior of crispy elements. The texture, sequence, and superstructure of proteins, carbohydrates, the distribution of fat and water, all of which are present in raw and cooked foodstuffs, range from micrometers to macro-

scopic measurements, which even now affect the form and shape of the elements on the plate. As opposed to nano- and microstructures, they are already visible.

Plating, serving techniques and the visual styling of a plate are now decisive. Nobody would think of serving two liquids (sauces, juices, etc.) close to each other on a plate if they had identically low viscosities. They would mix their individual aroma in an uncontrolled fashion. Plating is for this reason not only motivated by aesthetic and sensory intentions, but also pre-defined by the physical and chemical parameters of enjoyment: taste, aroma and texture.

According to theory, the meta-scale begins on the length scales. There impressions are touched on that relate to sensual perception. In addition, light, the room, and acoustics effect the plate imagery. The two levels, physiological perception and aesthetic perception become clear. At the meta-level the whole external impression is recorded, before the plate and its sensory content is noticed. This involves the room, its acoustics, noise, music, voices, lighting, colors, architecture, and interior design.

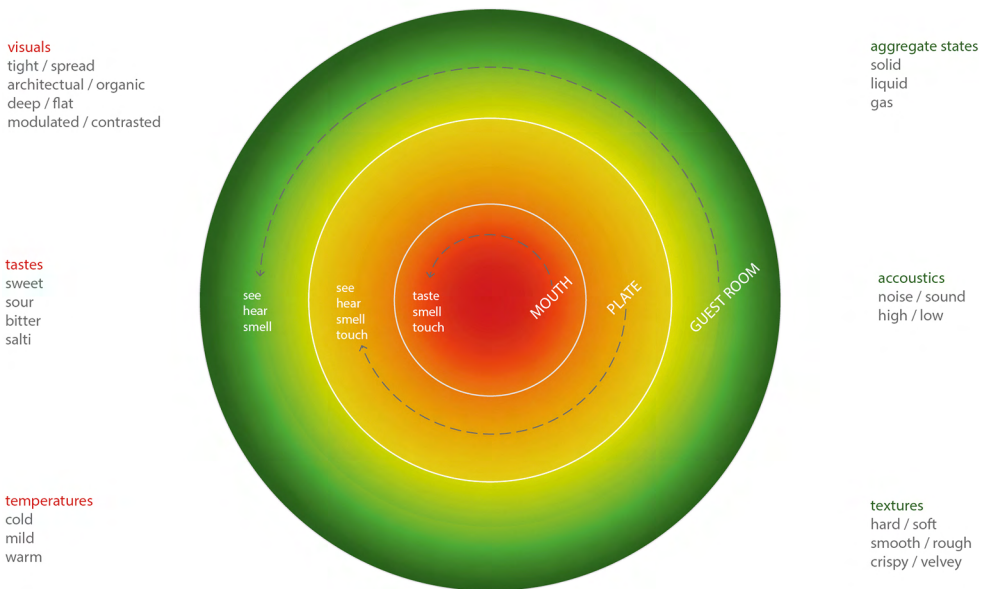


Fig. 9: Guestroom, Plate, mouth in relation to the perception levels (NvdM, Isabel Lina Christen)

The way the plate is styled is perceived at table. The style of cuisine can be recognized at first sight, the difference between classic and avant-garde cuisine is obvious. Chefs' different ideas become visible. In each case, elements and components are served differently according to colors,

textures, food groups, flavor aspects, and temperature. In terms of smell the first “scent blends” can now be perceived. The mixture of aromas that make up the fleeting fragrances defines the basic direction.

After evaluating the meta-scales of the plate’s appearance, the guests devote themselves to the sensory aspects in their mouth. In their brain these, together with all the impressions of the meta-scales, are put together to form the “flavor”.

LIVELINESS AND THE PLATE’S APPEARANCE

Lots of people have experienced this: If the host, room, plate’s appearance and food come together perfectly, the experience becomes an aesthetic one, which with regard to concentration, power, and sustainability otherwise only occurs this way in art. The arranged plate then has the character of a “gift”²⁷ because it is never to do with me alone. The arranged plate is more than something that can be just settled up by means of payment, as apart from the eating aspect it creates a surplus of meaning.²⁸ The gift goes back to a gesture of giving, which is not countered with money, but with certain customs and rituals. Acceptance of the gift, the contents of the plate, is answered with thanks, trust, commitment, and a sense of community. It creates feelings such as enjoyment, satisfaction, warmth, and happiness. But what is it that makes a perfect meal such an intensive experience, and what significance does the appearance of the plate play in this?

My hypothesis is that the aesthetic experience of eating tells us something about aesthetic experience in general and that eating (at least in the way described above) assumes a paradigmatic role in this context. A phenomenological view of aesthetic experience and the *enargeia/evidentia* discussion conducted a good ten years ago in the field of cultural studies and visual culture²⁹ offer an important starting point in terms of understanding. *Enargeia* suggests that the rhetoric of illustration, be it written or visual, cannot make do without a moment of liveliness running from the aesthetic object in the direction of the person perceiving it. The intended impact of *enargeia* is animation.

With regard to food and the appearance of the plate, this intended impact has a very concrete thrust, not just because one is hardly able to resist the attractiveness of a perfect meal, which can be experienced through smell, look, and taste, but also because the moment of the metaphorical *being touched* takes on a concrete, physiological side through the impact of

27 | Mauss: [1923/24] 1990.

28 | Waldenfels: 2008.

29 | Campe, R. (1997): Vor Augen-Stellen. Über den Rahmen rhetorische Bildgebung, in: Neumann, G. (ed.): *Poststrukturalismus. Herausforderungen der Literaturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart/Weimar, pp. 208–225; Belting, H. (2001): *Bildanthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, München; Boehm: 2003; Bredekamp, H. (2007): *Theorie des Bildakts*, Frankfurt/M.

enargeia during eating. The transformation of goods into enjoyable dishes, which makes a statement about a certain understanding of nature, community etc., leads at a metabolic level to an energy reserve provided for the person, which literally has an animation dimension which, however, goes beyond just usable energy. As such there is a literal and a metaphorical dimension, to touching and being touched through eating. The metaphorical dimension is often seen too little, because at the theoretical level is predominantly related to the satisfaction of primary needs.

Even if there are initial signs of being touched through food by the smell and sight of it, the pivotal moment is when it disappears from our field of vision and touches our tongue: “The object of taste is a form of the tangible; ... for no more is it so with touch”, Aristotle writes (“De Anima”, Book II, 10). Tasting always also has a tactile dimension. This too is given little attention in the current discourse about the aesthetics of eating. But is it touching or being touched? And if it is both, do both occur at the same time? Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the associated criss-crossing of subject and object a “chiasm” and describes it as a “reversible” interrelation. The example that Merleau-Ponty gives is touching one’s own hands: “If my left hand can touch my right hand, while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own?”³⁰

When I touch one of my hands with the other, I cannot at one and the same time feel my hand is the one that is touching and being touched. And the fact that simultaneously experiencing something as subject and object is not possible also applies to other senses. I cannot, for example, observe myself as subject and object at the same time. There is no coincidence of sight and visibility, of touching and touchable, but only a reversible interrelation or criss-crossing. Although this is no different in the case of tentative tasting, the transition from seeing the food to tentative tasting can be described as the maximum convergence point of that reversible chiasm of touching and touchable, of tasting and tasted. Because directly beyond this perception the non-simultaneity of the perception of subject and object disappears, as in metabolism the object is assimilated in the subject. The phrase “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” is a reminder of this. It states why like no other field of perception, tasting as enjoyment is associated with the possibility of bridging the hiatus and here is paradigmatic for what is known as aesthetic experience.

