

# Food – Media – Senses

## Preliminary Observations

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If one does not want to reduce eating to nutrition, then the aspect of sensorial experience comes to the fore. The observation that eating is linked to the sense of taste seems self-evident. The sensuality of eating is not restricted to taste, however. During a meal all senses are likely to be involved in a complex interplay.<sup>1</sup> How the senses are activated and brought into mutual relation is largely defined by cultural tradition or social habit but can be creatively aestheticized in fine dining, thereby moving eating into the realm of art. The modernist cuisines of the last two decades have taken recourse to scientific findings and processes in order to redefine the relations of color, shape, taste and texture, more or less freed from the constraints produced by natural ingredients (Pryba 2017). In their quest for a scientifically founded boost to their creative opportunities, these cooks were interested not only in the chemistry of cooking, but also in an exploration of the sensory perception of food, which they were eager to play upon.<sup>2</sup>

Not only in the culinary art of fine dining, but also in the design of industrially processed convenience foods,<sup>3</sup> trends of controlling all the senses in relation to each

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- 1 For a philosophical and anthropological dialogue on the interrelation of the senses, see e.g. Korsmeyer/Sutton 2011. Moreover, from an anthropological perspective there is a criticism – proceeding from food – that the specification of five senses, based on the Western philosophical tradition, could be overly reductionistic; see, e.g., Sutton 2017. For a brief introduction into the psychology of multi-sensory taste perception see Spence 2017b.
- 2 As a prime example, Heston Blumenthal's *Big Fat Duck Cookbook* contains a section titled *In the LAB: The Science of Food at the Fat Duck*, which contains short pieces by renowned researchers in the field of chemistry, neuroscience and perceptual psychology. Contributions include, amongst others, *Flavour Perception and Preference as a Learned Experience* by John Prescott, *Pleasure, the Brain and Food* by Francis McClone, *Multisensory Perception* by Charles Spence, and *The Role of the Mouth in the Appreciation of Food* by Jon F. Prinz (Blumenthal 2008: 462–507).
- 3 The rich psychological research into taste experiences, which can be practically transformed into food design, cannot be covered here in full. See as several representative examples Velasco/Nijholt/Karunananayaka 2018; Mota et al. 2018; Spence 2017a; Dar/Light 2014. In a similar vein, scientists collaborate with chefs as in Mouritsen/Styrbaek 2017. For an anthropological critique of the sensory research for the food industry cp. Lahne 2016.

other may be observed. For instance, when we consider the example of a salt and vinegar chip, then the sensory stimulation does not only consist of the extremely salty and sour taste announced to us by the smell when we bring the chip to our lips. Likewise playing a role in the experience is the visibly curved form of the dry slice of potato, which points towards the process of deep frying, just as is quite obviously the case with the tactile and acoustic sensation of crispness.<sup>4</sup> In a similar sense, the use of artificial coloring shows there is justification to the assumption that the optical perception of color is deeply involved in the gustatory experience and, particularly with industrial products, stabilizes the overall sensory experience (from a psychological point of view, see Spence/Levitin 2021). Conversely, blind tasting demonstrates how artificial it is to separate the senses (Korsmeyer/Sutton 2011: 462–464). In the erroneous conviction of being able to objectify sensory experience, the optical sensation is cancelled in order to block automatic retrieval of associative knowledge – whether based on cultural mediation or personal experience. But this sort of purification of the gustatory experience falls woefully short of the situations in which eating and drinking are customarily experienced. The fact that wine tastes better in conjunction with a fine meal or a creative label on the bottle does not constitute a distorting falsification that must be ferreted out, but instead corresponds to the multidimensional reality of experience and corresponding moldability of eating. Consequently, we argue that sensory and sensual *interaction* is the core of *all* eating practices, regardless of their cultural prestige. With eating (in the broader sense) we understand a set of cultural practices including the consumption of food as much as its preparation and presentation.

In the booming food research of the last three decades, the sensory aspects of eating have, of course, almost inevitably come up. It has to be qualified, however, that for the majority of the contributions the sensuality of eating has not been the starting point and basic premise; “despite its fundamental role, taste is often mysteriously absent from discussions about food” (Korsmeyer 2017, back cover). The humanities and social sciences have instead most often tended to foreground political and cultural aspects of food, without considering the arena of sensual experience in which they play out.<sup>5</sup> Most studies have not appropriately acknowledged how fundamentally food and eating are based on the agency and interplay of the senses. This reluctance to address the senses might be at least partly due to the fact that sensual

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4 There is an amazing amount of empirical research into the multisensory perception of potato chips; for a narrow selection see Vickers 1987; Zampini/Spence 2004; Spence 2012; Luckett/Meullenet/Seo 2016.

5 An exception inside the field is certainly anthropology, which has made the socially embedded sensory experience one of its core concerns; for an overview, see Sutton 2010 and more generally Howes 2019. A multidisciplinary overview of the research on the sensuality of eating is offered by Korsmeyer 2017.

experience was and still is denigrated and only considered as culturally acceptable when it is sublimated into the creation of meaning and knowledge. The ingestion of the object of perception, as happens in eating, has in no way seemed to be in a position to transcend the bodily aspect, in the manner of the distal sensory perceptions of seeing and hearing (Perullo 2016: 15). We are confronted with an implicit hierarchization of the senses that devalues the proximal senses over sight and hearing (Simmel 1992 [1908]; Korsmeyer 1999: chap. 1). The degree to which public and scientific discourse denigrates sensual experience becomes apparent upon observing that current research almost inevitably associates sumptuous visual representations of food with 'porn,' for the purpose of robbing them of all cultural pedigree.<sup>6</sup> This negative bias might be the reason for a lack of differentiated linguistic tools and of useful distinctions when it comes to tasting and smelling – the senses which are key to describing the specificity of eating. Whereas tools for capturing the visual and auditory have been developed by scholars of musicology, art history, media studies or theater studies, a language for grasping the aesthetic and media-related properties of tasting and smelling has yet to be developed.

Attempts at linguistic differentiation like the Wine Aroma Wheel, which was created by UC Davis sensory chemist Ann C. Noble in 1984, lay open how little original language is available to describe taste. The Aroma Wheel provides close to 90 descriptors, but all of these designate taste by way of comparison to given objects whose taste is evoked.<sup>7</sup> In wine tasting, the majority of these objects of reference are fruits other than grapes. Noble is, however, rather inventive and offers some unexpected associations. The most eye-catching categories are "burnt match," "horsey" and "wet wool/wet dog." To be helpful, these categories presuppose that taste works by association. In this vein, the challenge for a study of food which chooses to welcome its sensory aspects is to reflect upon and develop research tools commensurate with the sensuality of eating.

A cultural science which is on eye level with the cultural technique of designing food – as fine dining or as convenience food – is still lacking. Even the most re-

6 A critical view of the term is offered in McBride (2010). Most texts, however, adopt instead an affirmative attitude and identify #foodporn with the aestheticization in the social media, without critically examining the implications of the metaphor: e.g. McDonnell (2016) and David/Allard (2022). The photographers on Instagram have put a positive twist on the word as a hashtag which is proudly attached to aestheticized photos of food.

7 See Noble et al. 1987; on the invention of the Aroma Wheel in the context of scientific sensory research, Shapin 2016. Inspired by the Wine Aroma Wheel, many followed suit and created respective aroma wheels for whiskey, honey, cheese, etc.; see for example Shields-Argelès 2016. On the challenges of appraising and describing wine from a philosophical point of view, Perullo 2021: 33–53, 99; Smith 2007. But the observation has been made that the lack of vocabulary is not a fundamental impediment to a diversified gustatory experience (Ankerstein/Pereira 2013).

cently flourishing food studies seem only peripherally concerned with the sensually experienced *aisthesis* of dishes and, when dealing with the socio-cultural aspects of eating, fall back onto a wider perspective of cultural studies instead of rephrasing that point of view by virtue of an approach starting from the sensory. In order to acknowledge the material and media-related aspects of eating as a cultural praxis, the anthology at hand proposes to understand the various manifestations of eating as a purposefully designed sensory experience. We insist that when the cultural and social aspects of foods are at issue, the sensorial experience must not be left out or marginalized, but should rather be at the core – a site where the social manifests and intersects with the bodily.<sup>8</sup>

This is where we want to introduce the concept of the medium: as an interface bringing food, the senses and culture into mutual connection. By including the perspective of mediality we mean understanding cooking as a sensual design. Insofar as dishes are designed with regard to a sensual experience which they activate, they themselves may be considered as media. They organize perceptive opportunities which are strongly formed by culture and in special ways address the sensory as much as the cultural production of sense. Focusing on the senses in combination with the concept of media is our proposal for re-drafting the relation of food and the senses in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, fine dining even works with textures, smells and nuances of taste in an attempt to create meaning and even 'tell' stories.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on the senses in combination with the concept of media and its heuristics is meant to open up a new perspective on food and eating.

This perspective is initially oriented less towards media as mediators. Media as mediators are interesting, for example, with regard to food packaging, with its information regarding the contents of the package. But it is more a matter of the modeling of perceptual acts with respect to the preparation and consumption of food-stuffs. Here it is indisputable that both – the actual food product that is the focus of the act of perception and the add-on such as is constituted by the informative packaging – cannot be separated one from the other. Consumable contents and external presentation partially exist in direct correspondence, as is indicated by the example of Capri-Sun<sup>10</sup>: the drink is marketed in a flexible upright bag along with a straw. The outer form has a direct influence on the mode of consumption, because the flow of liquid can be regulated by squeezing the bag. The act of compression adds a further sensory aspect to the act of drinking: a haptic aspect comes into play along with the texture of the liquid and the sweetness of the sugary drink, which can be tasted

<sup>8</sup> Thus the anthropologist David Sutton perspectivizes the relationship between sensory perception, food and culture with a particular emphasis on individual and collective memories; see exemplarily Sutton 2001, 2017; Korsmeyer/Sutton 2011: pp. 468–474.

<sup>9</sup> For one compact example, see Boutaud 2012: 89 with reference to Sagot/Dupont 2009.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.caprisun.com/>

and felt by means of the tongue. The squeezable bag of Capri-Sun already provides a first indication that the interconnection between food and media is not limited to the fact that food serves as content for media or as the subject of representation by the media. Instead, the transitions between the media presentation and the ‘actual’ food are free-flowing. The outside of the package provides an indication of the contents while at the same time the packaging and its design cannot be separated from the contents and their consumption.

This is evident not only in the area of industrially produced foodstuffs but also in fine dining, which makes the reflection of this convergence the theme of its menus – at the latest since the 2010s, when there was a trend to deconstruction upon the plate. During that decade, the fashion was to separate the components of the food upon the plate, to alter or unify the textures of the respective foods in an unusual manner so as to cause new interpretations to emerge with regard to taste.<sup>11</sup> These dishes frequently present themselves draped upon the plate in a variety of differently colored dabs around a scenical center – in most cases, an animal product; only the central item is featured with its own texture, whereas the other elements are made to resemble it. The dabs could be said to represent that which is generally considered to be a side dish, inasmuch as they consist of the same components. The alteration of the handling of the products and the gustatory-sensory experience is accompanied by a change in the procedure of its optical presentation: the ‘pointillism’ on the plate, consisting of same-shaped but differently-colored points, goes hand in hand with a redefinition of dishes with regard to taste. The mode of deconstruction reflects only a phenomenon that is fundamentally valid, namely that presentation makes a difference and already belongs to the ‘actual’ food (see also Boutaud 2012). It is not only the visual conveyor of a gustatory experience, but also always an integral component. The one blends into the other.

It is precisely this comprehensive design of a perceptual object which, in a multimodal manner, addresses the senses that constitute the mediality of food. The term mediality first of all addresses the finding that media do not simply convey messages. Instead they stand in direct relation to the manner of perception, thought and recollection, and thereby to accessibility to the world, in other words how the relationship to the world, or more precisely to reality, is organized – indeed, how something becomes reality in the first place (Krämer 1998: 14). The question then arises as to how our access to food and to eating is structured and how food, as a designed object integrated into significatory contexts, itself participates in this act of structuring.

This sort of mediality oriented towards perception points towards a media-aesthetic research program that has its point of departure in the mid-twentieth century and is based on an altered understanding of aesthetics. In place of art-theoretical

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<sup>11</sup> For a consideration of plating as a “pictorial practice” see van der Meulen 2017.

considerations, an orientation towards the beautiful and towards the cultivation of refinement, issues of perception and cognition come to the fore. And emerging in place of an art considered to be a separate realm of reality that is responsible for engendering discernment is an everyday aesthetic which identifies shapeliness in all areas of life (Barck/Henninger/Kliche 2000: 389–398).

What is significant for the present context is not only the understanding of aesthetics in the sense of *aisthesis*, but also the observation of a comprehensive aesthetization; in other words, the act of shaping comes to light in all reaches of reality – especially in the field of the media, which appear from a media-aesthetic perspective as designed providers of perception: they shape perception, each in its own particular way. The media-aesthetic program inquires into how media form reality and insists upon the *how* in contradistinction to that which is offered to perception. A premise of media aesthetics is that every form of media expression “possesses a specific manner of perception that is inherent to it and to it alone” (Schnell 2000: 11). The question is subsequently raised as to the precise intrinsic mode of various media. As a rule, however, primacy is given to the auditory and the visual: the senses that proceed from a distance (Schnell 2000: 11). Proximal perception tends to be taken seldom as a theme. This gap can be closed by an involvement with the theme of food, its mediality and its multimodality. In this way there is a neglecting of the media quality of imbuing what is absent with presence, but there is a highlighting of the design of perception and the manner of its organization.

Moreover, the study of the involvement of media in eating needs to be extended by adopting a broad concept of media, one which makes it possible to include the constitutive roles of menu, cutlery, tableware and dining room without relegating them to the secondary role of “context”.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, we have to describe the preparation and combination of food together with the specific choice of tableware, table decoration, furniture, interior design, music and, last but not least, the service at the table and additional media components. Also, the fine arts have always reflected on such aesthetic and socio-cultural dimensions of food, for example in the genre of the still life or, since modernity, in interactive settings which take eating as a starting point for blurring the realms of art and life or even for creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Jaques 2015: 181; Beil 2002: 45–47; Wattolik 2018).<sup>13</sup>

12 This becomes particularly evident in the design of restaurants, most obviously in ethnic and event gastronomy. Restaurants are not just sites where food is cooked and consumed, but where eating is contextualized – or even staged – in a meaningful way; see Möhring 2012; Beriss/Sutton 2007. A multidisciplinary view of the effects of eating with the hands as compared to eating with cutlery is presented in Spence 2022. Likewise, the role of material artifacts in the cooking experience has been explored by Sutton 2009. For a concise and combined history of cooking and eating tools, see Wilson 2013.

13 Tommaso Marinetti describes how in the First Futurist Meal at the Taverna del Santopalato opening in Torino on March 8, 1931, all five senses were addressed. While eating foods com-

Finally, media come into play when representing and communicating the act of eating in advance or after the fact. Under this aspect, we may ask by which forms of linguistic expression, structure and imagery a cooking recipe is characterized, for example; how film and television evoke the sensual experience of eating; or how the oeuvre of a certain chef is represented in photo books. Complementarily, it has to be asked in which ways a whole media ensemble is grouped around food and its preparation, how such a media ensemble organizes perception and consequently feeds back directly onto the senses. The intrinsic logic of particular media and how it affects the presentation of food has to be taken into consideration, too.

In order to offer a systematic structure, we have identified three fields in which the relation of food and the senses are mediatized. We offer them as a heuristic proposition that can help to structure our reflections: Food as Medium, Food in Media, Sociality and Culturality of Food.

## 1. Food as Medium

United Arab Emirates – On March 11, 2017, during the opening of Sharjah Art Biennial, the London based artist-duo Cooking Sections (Daniel Fernández Pascual/Alon Schwabe) arranged a happening for lunch. Guests and voluntary performers of the piece named *CLIMAVORE: On the Movement of Deserts* consisted of the international art crowd. The group gathered around tables that were designed especially for the event. Their geometric patterns were based on the formations of desert plants which collectively grow in accordance with scarce water supplies. In that sense, the design of *CLIMAVORE*'s setting referred to an example of extreme ecological adaption. The multi-course menu offered a selection of edible desert plants: served as aperitif was a *Dryland Salinity Drink* made out of tamarind, agave and jujube. This was followed by a *Dune Stabilization Salad* which was made of sorghum, caper, sea asparagus, sea rosemary, sea purslane and elderberry.<sup>14</sup> Four more courses with telling names were served: *Insurance Crop Sticks* and, as the menu reads, *Water Accumulators*, *Water Reductionists* and *Desert Stoppers*. By providing information about the climate conditions of its ingredients as much as about desert-spreading in general, the menu charged all dishes semantically and, on the edge of the Arabian Desert, pointed to a broader dis-

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bined in aesthetic, symbolic and gustatory interrelationships, the guests touched with their fingertips arrangements of damask, velvet and glass paper while a fragment from an opera by Wagner could be heard and a waiter sprayed perfume (Beil 2002: 47; Stronciwilk 2021).

14 The first and second course of the menu are documented with two photographs on the website of Universes in Universe: <https://universes.art/de/sharjah-biennale/2017/sharjah/visual-tour-12/cooking-sections>

cussion on climate change and its underlying structures of economic and political power.

It is not only since the invitation of the star cook Ferran Adrià to the documenta 12 in 2007 (Beaugé 2018) that food and art have inspired each other. The beginning of food-related stagings by artists under the heading of a modern notion of art – in other words, in an overarching display of food designed as both the material of art and its subject of reflection – was already identified in the futuristic cuisine of Tommaso Marinetti and the erotic arrangements of Salvador Dalí. The 1960s and 1970s bring a continuation of their experiments in Eat Art, Fluxus, Happening and Environment, for instance in the works of Daniel Spoerri, Peter Kubelka, Gordon Matta-Clark or Allen Rappersberg (Beil 2002; Novero 2010; Smith 2013; Bottinelli/D'Ayala Valva 2017). Finally, offers of participatory eating experience a renaissance at the beginning of the 1990s, when Rirkrit Tiravanija begins, against the background of preceding reflections concerning the museum display, to cook Thai curry at his exhibitions and to distribute it among the visitors. With these and other stagings of food, there is an emphasis on the immediate experiential dimension and its potential for creating community in a society that is deeply marked by the mass media.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Jörn Schafaff introduced the notions of set, scenario and situation, thereby aiming at the definition of a reflective experiential space which is deliberately staged with artistic means and according to which the actions of visitors to the exhibition are oriented. Here the set and its objects can represent a comprehensive significatory framework when they refer to a context of utilization or a lifestyle (Schafaff 2018: 49).

Food appears to inherently annul the seeming opposition between bodily-related implicit and explicit, mostly linguistically or socio-culturally encoded knowledge. For this very reason there has in recent years been a recognition of the potential for a connection between art and food in aesthetic approaches whose considerations are centered around a sensory, bodily-based perception of the world (Koczanowicz 2023; Smolińska 2020; see also Shustermann 2012; Michel Serres 1995; Mattenkrott 1982). The regarding of stagings of food as sensorily perceived and simultaneously encoded, mediating instances makes possible a double consideration of 'object and sign' (Koch 2005). With respect to the semiotic character of food – or more precisely, its taste – Carolyn Korsmeyer proposes the rendering fertile of the term of "exemplification" coined by Nelson Goodman. Exemplification, which according to Goodman is a "symptom" of art, occurs when an object not only possesses its characteristics but also presents them (Goodman 1968: chap. VI, 5). Korsmeyer says that a gourmet pays attention to the characteristics of culinary dishes and drinks, perceiving, evaluating or enjoying them in a special way. Contextual information such

<sup>15</sup> Particular attention was given in the 1990s to the term relational aesthetics, which was coined by the curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2001 [1998]).

as the site and date when a foodstuff was harvested only becomes relevant when it contributes to explaining the specific characteristics of the gustatory experience (Korsmeyer 1999: 128). Thus Korsmeyer – whose book on *Making Sense of Taste* was groundbreaking for the academic field of gustatory aesthetics<sup>16</sup> flourishing since the early 1990s – is able to refute the criticism that food is incapable of expressing anything beyond the sensory pleasure it engenders, of signifying anything at all, and hence is utterly unsuitable for art (Korsmeyer 1999: 108–109).<sup>17</sup> Jean-Philippe Dupuy, on the other hand, sees the artistic potential of the culinary in the connection between the gustatory composition of food and its staging – from the architecture of the restaurant all the way to the arrangement of the plates on the table and the serving practices – as well as in the semantic energizing through language: for example, in the menu and the discourse that accompanies the meal (Dupuy 2012: 102). It is only with a view to this superordinate arrangement that such rhetorical figures as exaggeration and euphemism can develop and direct attention from the *what* to the *how* of food. Here the framing of food serves to highlight its function as a medium which shapes sensory experience. These two exemplary positions make it clear that the question concerning the degree to which the culinary is capable of being art can be discussed and answered in quite divergent manners (see also Cohen/Csergo 2012; Perullo 2017; Csergo/Desbuissons 2018; Koczanowicz 2023). In any case, the contrasting or also complementary approaches of Korsmeyer and Dupuy not only demonstrate approaches for evaluating food as art from a semiotic perspective, but also go much further in sufficiently clarifying its media-related qualities, which are capable of shaping sensory experience. These media-related qualities are inherent to food as an aesthetic practice, because it is impossible not to perform the act of shaping. Under certain conditions, it is possible not only in art for something potentially lying beyond the field of the senses to find sensory expression.

When food becomes the subject and material of the visual arts, its media-related potential becomes situated in a specific discursive context that is only rendered comprehensible against the background of artistic traditions. For example, when in 1992 Tiravanija removed all the furniture from the back room of the 303 Gallery in New York and shifted it into the main room, he was linking up with an institutionally critical intervention of Michael Asher in 1974 at the Claire Copley Gallery in Los

16 For an overview on gustatory aesthetics, see Jaques 2015; Perullo 2019.

17 The semiotic potentials of food were already explored from a structuralist perspective by the anthropologist Mary Douglas, beginning with her classic text *Deciphering a Meal* (1972). She establishes a structural grid, based mostly on binary distinctions, into which flow the aesthetic-sensory parameters of food – taste, texture, and so forth – that imbue food with a cultural location and hence with meaning, but that neglect the sensory experience (Sutton 2010: 210–211). The French scholar of communication Jean-Jacques Boutaud, on the other hand, endeavors to conceive of the semiotics of food on the basis of synaesthetic, sensory experience (2005, 2012). For a general overview of the semiotics of food, see Stano (2015).

Angeles.<sup>18</sup> Asher had removed the wall separating the gallery-owner's office from the exhibition space and thereby brought to the fore the site where the communication is carried out that is crucial for every gallery, where decisions about purchases are made. If now over the entire course of the exhibition Tiravanija was preparing two types of Thai curry – one with ingredients from a nearby supermarket, the other in the way it is eaten in Thailand – this was initially a matter of adapting a foreign cuisine to the available offerings of foodstuffs or of conforming to the culturally determined taste preferences that predominated at that place. Whereas Asher merely revealed the way in which the art market functions, Tiravanija transferred everyday functional interconnections into the realm of aesthetic reflection and, by distributing food at no cost, contrasted the context of the profit-oriented art market with the concept of largesse. Furthermore, at the beginning of the surge in globalization from 1989 onward, he thematized his own position as a cosmopolitan artist of Thai origin in an art market which, particularly in the 1990s, was still strongly subject to Western domination (Saltz 1996; Nesbitt 1992; Schafaff 2018: 135–151; also Schafaff 2014). Also with respect to the initially presented work *CLIMAVORE: On the Movement of Deserts*, it should be observed that the protagonists from the art world who were invited to the meal are not merely consumers but also objects of reflection in the artistic scenario so that, for example, their co-responsibility for climate change can be thematized by the specific offerings of food just as can the concomitant consequences. This is all the more the case inasmuch as every artistic position that works after 1992 with the means of a staged provision of food must allow itself to be referenced to Tiravanija and his critique of institutions and globalization.

The first block focusses on the media-related qualities of eating, which is understood as a designed sensual experience. Food as a multisensory and multimodal object of perception comes into view along with all related practices of preparation, presentation and consumption. In contrast to traditional approaches in the study of meals, we suggest an understanding of the preparation, presentation and consumption of food not as a cultural framing, but as a communicative practice which includes the meal's design and its whole field of experience: Which role is played by sensual experience when buying and preparing food? Which options are there to control the parameters of sensory experience during cooking? How is a meal arranged so as to let the eater have a certain experience? How is food semantically charged? Of course, specific associations are induced in food; but can we imagine other strategies as well? The analysis of happenings in the fine arts which perform and simultaneously reflect on the preparation of food as much as on its communal

18 Installation views of *Untitled (Free)* from 1992 are presented on 303 Gallery's website (<https://www.303gallery.com/gallery-exhibitions/rirkrit-tiravanija2>). The work's name was changed into *Untitled (Free/Still)* in 1995 and today belongs to the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147206>

consumption can yield great insights. Art works not only use food and its staging as a vehicle for messages but can also convey its sociocultural implications and even reveal how the construction of culture works.

## 2. Food in Media

The representation of eating and the sensual experience connected with it has a long history: the interest in food's colors and tactile surfaces is one of the major causes for the emancipation of the still life as a genre of its own. Still lifes can function in analogy to the sense of taste when painterly means such as sharply modulated edges and striking chords of color convey the piquancy of a lemon's sourness (Leonhard 2020: 74). Moreover, by means of the exaggerated illusionism of *trompe-l'oeil* painting, the depicted food can acquire so intensive a corporeal presence that it is capable of addressing the bodily knowledge of the viewer by means of an "eating eye" or a "seeing stomach" (Ebert-Schifferer 2018: 189–190). These strategies of the visual depiction of food are continued in food photography, whose aesthetic program is intended to give an appetizing appearance to and hence to create advertising for products and dishes on the one hand, and recipes in a cookbook or a blog on the other (Bright 2017). Consequently it is a matter of transferring the sensuous qualities of food into colors and form in such a way that they have the possibility of engendering sensory reactions in the viewers. This objective has been extended further by professional food photography into the social media, where the term #foodporn has freed itself of negative connotations and is instead laying claim to a special aesthetic quality in the photographic depiction of food. The core of the promise made by pornography, namely to impact as a "body genre" upon the physical body of the viewers,<sup>19</sup> is realized in the intrinsic value of the image as a visual spectacle in which there is a loosening of its relationship to actual food that, as is well-known, is designed solely to please the camera of the food photographer and not to satisfy the palate (Hunter 1991: 153–154). This shift is due to the fact that depictions of food are obligated to conform to the respectively dominant media parameters and cultural conventions, thereby becoming able for their part to impact upon the practice of eating: photogenics and, recently, instagrammability favor colorful and structured dishes, which has rendered dishes like bowls popular.<sup>20</sup>

19 The term of the filmic "body genre" coined by Linda Williams (1991) differs from food photography inasmuch as it proceeds from the premise that the excesses presented in film by female bodies are reproduced by the viewing bodies. The non-sublimated, desire-filled affects of the senses which are linked to the visual depiction remain a parallel, just as does the cultural degradation of the pictorial form.

20 For research on the cultures of digital food photography see Leaver/Highfield/Abidin, 2020; Beil 2020; de Solier 2018. Less concerned with the sensory and insofar typical representatives

Nonetheless, the presentation of food in the media is fundamentally concerned with how the respective medium can use its particular possibilities to capture – or in any case to convey – the multisensory design of food. Medial observations of food and eating are confronted with the problem of how the sensory registers of the medium of food can be captured and paralleled by the sensory registers of the observing medium. The fundamental challenge lies in using language, picture and sound to catch not just taste but also the full spectrum of the sensory. Thus, the objective of food in media is typically not ‘representation’ but ‘evocation’: the purpose is to make the sensory experience tangible, even relivable in a sense. The method is, therefore, remediation, coupling a particular design of sensory experience with a corresponding one. This possibility of rendering the mediality of food in another medium is based, especially in the case of the visual and audiovisual media, upon the fundamental synesthesia of perception, which always integrates gustatory and olfactory experiences in a network of sensory experiences.<sup>21</sup>

Why are food and eating so prevalent in media culture, even when it is so difficult to evoke smell, taste and texture with the media currently available? Leaving the cultural currency of food aside, one could argue that the challenge is exactly *why* the evocation of food and eating is so often attempted. The remediation of food is prone to produce a media spectacle which offers the media an opportunity to showcase their potency to evoke the sensory. The exploration of painting’s evocative capacities is obvious in the genre of the still life. And this goes as well for the animated film, when it invents pictorial forms to convey an indulging in the sensory – a potential, not available to the same degree to the dominating ‘photofilmic’ and ‘photographic’ depiction of food and eating. The animation film *Ratatouille* (USA 2007) and even more so the Japanese anime series *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma* (JP 2015–2020) have proven to be particularly inventive in creating excessive visual metaphors in which not only the delicacy of the dishes but also the tasting experience become images.<sup>22</sup>

Food in media can – to list only some of the most pertinent instances – crystallize into genres in different media, some of which we will briefly touch upon:

- Recipes and cooking instructions, whether in books or online in food blogs, employ language, drawings, photographs or video to advise how to prepare

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of current Anglophone media research are Contois/Kich 2022, Lupton/Feldman 2020, Lewis 2020 and Leer/Krogager 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Without using the term remediation, the French communication scholar Jean-Jacques Bouteaud (2012; 2016a) posits a convergence between the signification of food and its aesthetic mediatization.

<sup>22</sup> In its visual language, *Food Wars* focuses not least of all on the affinity between sexual and gustatory pleasure. Moreover, Swahn/Nilsen (2023) emphasize with regard to *ratatouille* the role of the soundtrack for the synaesthetic impact.

food: firstly, in relation to the sensuality of the practices and gestures involved; secondly, through motivating the audience to give it a try by showcasing the presumed sensual pleasures of the result. Cookbooks can generate sensual surplus value through stylistic choices in the writing and by adding additional parts to the text (Humble 2020) or, more commonly, by using spectacular food photographs (Hunter 1991; Dennis 2008; Ruchatz 2017). With regard to illustrations, a potential conflict can arise between the didactic function and the intrinsic aesthetic value and sensual appeal of the picture.

- Fiction, particularly when it is presented audiovisually, frequently includes scenes of eating, less often of cooking. Whereas the sensual experience may often be less important than the social interaction around the table – an aspect that provides story information – films sometimes make use of their audiovisual prowess, combining close-up, camera movements and sound in order to evoke the sensual experience of eating and cooking.<sup>23</sup>
- With regard to television cooking shows, it is not only the preparation of the food, typically stressing the sounds in the kitchen, which brings the sensory to the fore (Adema 2000, de Solier 2005; Collins 2009; Spies 2010; Meier 2013; Oren 2023). It is also the question as to how the sensory experience can be transmitted to the audience when the cooked food is eaten and judged.<sup>24</sup>
- Food reviewing is a verbal practice, putting the experience into words and judging it. The sensory drawbacks of language are typically compensated for, as already stated, by using metaphors and comparisons in an inventive manner (Spillner 2002, 2015).
- Mukbang- and ASMR-videos, with the success they have had in recent years on YouTube, are an especially strange instance of the thematizing of the act of eating. Their point of departure is not so much the sensory presentation of the dishes; instead, they bring the process of eating front and center by using extremely sensitive microphones to record the noises of chewing and lip-smacking which are customarily suppressed (or are covered over with background music), thereby turning these sounds into a fundamental attraction of the presentation (Nielsen/Petersen 2021).

It is noticeable that as a rule in the investigation of these media artifacts, such issues as cultural significance and ideology, power structures and patterns of exploitation,

23 Particularly interesting with regard to the sensual experience of film, because seen from a phenomenological point of view, is Zechner 2013. See also Wocke 2012; Kofahl/Fröhlich/Alberth 2013; Lindenfeld/Parasecoli 2017, 2018. For food in fictional literature, see e.g. Humble 2020, Crucifix 2016; Moss 2013; Becker 2000; Korsmeyer 1999.

24 The sensual can also be shifted to another, most often sexualized, register (Andrews 2003; Chan 2003).

or also gender roles are addressed, whereas the role played by sensory experience in this framework is consistently marginalized, if not ignored.<sup>25</sup>

The observation of food and eating in textual, visual and audiovisual media is not a one-way-street, however. The visual mise-en-scene of food is often fed back into the experience of eating. To give just three striking examples:

- The visual and linguistic design of menus, especially with regard to the naming of the dishes, awakens expectations in the diners, impacts upon their selection of dishes, and thus makes an essential contribution to preparing their sensory pleasure.<sup>26</sup> Ethnic or high-cultural associations with regard to culinary offerings are awakened not least of all through the appropriate naming of the dishes (Zwicky/Zwicky 1980; Freedman 2010). Linguistic research on the ‘rhetoric’ of menus has elaborated how this works to merge sensory experience and social identities (Lavric 2009; Dupuy 2009; Freedman 2010; Hugol-Gentil 2015; Parizot/Giboreau/Hugol-Gentil 2015). A particular case are photographic menus (particularly common in fast food restaurants or international tourist spots) which pictorially arouse sensory expectations and result in the choice of a certain dish (for just one example, Kuo 2015).<sup>27</sup>
- Visual communication as an applied science, at the service of the food industry, deals with the relationship between packaging design and buying decisions.<sup>28</sup> On product packaging, food photography can work like a serving suggestion inasmuch as it can trigger sensual associations in combination with color design, etc. The staging of food on food packaging – in the typical form of the serving suggestion – is designed to enhance the eating experience, optically suggesting the material and sensory qualities that have been lost in the process of industrial production (Ruchatz 2018; d’Errico 2021).
- The already mentioned UC Davis Wheel works in the same realm, but with a different objective: it is not about reconstituting sensory qualities that have possibly evaporated, but about using the medial intervention to educate and refine

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25 The marginalization of the sensory element in current research regarding the media can be clearly recognized in the omnibus volumes: Bradley 2015; Leer/Povlsen 2016; Marinescu 2020; Fakazis/Fürsich 2023.

26 This effect of recipe labelling has been ascertained by empirical marketing research with a nod to restaurant owners (Wansink/van Ittersum/Panter 2001, 2005). For a historical perspective on naming dishes in cookbooks, see Notaker 2017: 98–111.

27 For a more general view on the visual design of menus, which is in most cases only loosely tied to what is served, see Poulain 2011; Heimann 2022.

28 For a semiotic and cultural studies perspective see Haden 2017; Jones 2014. For empirical psychological studies with the appeal to practical use, see among others Velasco et al. 2016; Huang/Lu 2015; Chardon 2012.

taste. As the official website states: “Novice tasters often complain that they ‘cannot smell anything’ or can’t think of a way to describe the aroma of wine. They don’t have the words! [...] Using the wheel during wine tasting will facilitate the description of the flavors you perceive. More importantly, you will be able to easily recognize and remember specific details about wines.”<sup>29</sup> In this case, the capacity to describe taste linguistically is not just about reproducing the experience but is seen as feeding directly back into the tasting experience, which shows how intricately food and its remediations are interrelated.

### 3. Sociality and Culturality of Food and Eating

In addition to the connection between eating and the media, the question of interest is also how the sensuality of eating is treated in specific cultural contexts. It is not only about preferences – for example, for the bitter or for the sour – but also about the involvement of the different senses in eating: In which cultural contexts is the sense of sight particularly emphasized? In which cultural contexts is the sense of touch addressed through texture?

At the same time, the consideration of touch, smell, taste and so on suggests first of all that these are natural processes. But in the context of his investigation of the distinction between raw and cooked or rotten and cooked, Claude Lévi-Strauss has already pointed out the semanticization of the supposedly natural side of this distinction: the raw is not the natural and unprocessed food, it seems, but the opposite of processed, as he makes explicit with an anecdote from World War I. He tells of the olfactory challenges of U.S. soldiers in the face of Norman cheese, the aroma of which reminded them of the smell of a corpse (Lévi-Strauss 2008 [1966]: 37). What is a process of maturity for the Frenchman is a process of decay for the American, and what for one is culinary refinement is for another exactly its opposite, depending on cultural identities.

In addition to the findings of Lévi-Strauss, not only the relation between the raw and cooked (1983 [1964]) but also the distinction between liquid, soft and solid plays a role. Noodles are a good example, because they are a widespread food. Even if the

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29 <https://www.winearomawheel.com/why-use-it.html>; see also: “The Wine Aroma Wheel is an incredible tool to learn about wines and enhance one’s ability to describe the complexity of flavor in red and white wines. Initially, most people can’t recognize or describe aromas so the purpose of the wheel is to provide terms to describe wine aromas” (<https://www.awslonestar.org/wine-education/wine-evaluation.html>). For the effects of the aroma wheel on the wine tasting practice, see Shapin 2016 and James 2018. Boutaud 2016b expresses an ambivalent attitude to the cultivation of the taste for wine, which can also be understood as domestication.

basic ingredients may vary between the countries, noodles share the same production process: the finely ground wheat or its alternatives are mixed with water and kneaded into a dough which can be shaped, dried and thus preserved (Lucas 2009). The noodles are then cooked in boiling water and this is where it starts to get exciting, because how to cook noodles properly and what texture this should achieve varies widely. The tasting and evaluation of noodles seems to be an extremely culturally-specific process. National identities correspond in part with the sensation of the consistency of noodles. And cultural affiliations are expressed on the basis of noodle preferences.

A quick search on the internet and social media makes this clear. The search starts with a German-language entry on the search engine which could be rendered in English as “cooking noodles the right way.” The prime result is “cooking tips directly from Italy.” In Germany and in many parts of Europe, Italy reigns supreme when it comes to preparing pasta. Even if there are German pasta dishes, pasta is associated with *italianità* – as Roland Barthes (1977 [1964]) already knew. Pasta is therefore eaten like the Italians do: *al dente*. Whereas in Germany during the eighties this knowledge could be used to gain distinction, today everyone imitates the Italians (Alberini 1990: 39). It is interesting that *al dente* is the only statement about texture with reference to Italy. It is repeated permanently, but at the same time there are no other descriptions for the consistency. It seems as if Italian pasta cooked *al dente* is the medium for the taste of the sauce.

And this is perhaps also where the cultural identity of pasta lies, because Italian eating habits are characterized by the peculiarity of taking carbohydrates as a separate course before the *secondo* consisting of meat and vegetables (Lucas 2009: 4). This then perhaps also accounts for the Italian dominance in the pasta discourse. With this particularity, Italians were able to gain sovereignty over pasta.

After Germany has bid farewell to its soft-cooked noodles over the course of about 50 years and accepted and adopted the *al dente* noodle as superior in taste, we are now confronted with another cooking culture: China. It seems that Chinese cuisine demands a softer texture of the noodle than *al dente*, even though this softness is certainly different from the softness of the former German noodle. Soft, but not mushy. The perfect noodle is supposed to have the characteristics of being chewy, springy, smooth. Here, then, we find a rich repertoire of words that serve to describe the texture of the perfectly produced noodle. This verbal abundance can be read as an indication that Chinese cuisine places an increased focus on this component of the meal and therefore also serves the dishes at the same time, thus placing the textures next to each other instead of separating them from each other in a specific sequence of courses as in Italy. The preference for a specific texture of pasta can thus be explained by a whole culinary and cultural cosmos. The cultural habitualization of the interaction of food shapes the taste preferences that are part of social identity. However, it becomes clear that pasta is eminently suitable for

cultural comparison. On the one hand, it belongs to many cuisines; and on the other hand, it is so different that the variations can be named in order to express one's own cultural identity through the assessment of the texture of noodles. Thus sensual experience becomes understandable as basically being socially formed. The difference lies in also how much attention is paid to the aspect of texture.

At this point, we would like to reflect on the sensuality of cultural and national identities (Helstosky 2003). Following the discussion regarding a sociology of taste, as has been prominently guided by Pierre Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), we aim to identify how the relationship between sensual experience and social biography contributes to the formation of social identity. Sensory experience becomes understandable as basically socially formed; concurrently, the socio-cultural formation is recognized as a naturalized one when, for example, preferences of taste are regarded as being gender-based.

Bourdieu provides illustrative examples here when he identifies interconnections between the division of labor in the household, class distinctions, and taste preferences. The acknowledgment of the work of women in the upper class is transferred into a preference for salad and grilled meat, something which additional corresponds to a certain body image. In contrast, the lower class esteems the *pot-au-feu*, in which much time is spent to alter the texture of meat of less quality through protracted simmering (Bourdieu 1984 [1974]: 430). And Bourdieu likewise sees the high degree of aversion to bones in fish as the effect of a certain class-specific and gender-marked bodily image: since the physically laboring man requires a correspondingly sufficient intake of calories, he cannot be expected to ingest food in such tiny bits that the possibility of the presence of a fishbone is taken into consideration. The food must be able to fill the entire mouth (Bourdieu 1984 [1974]: 435–437). The body image, including notions regarding the characteristics of the mouth, and the sense of taste are directly interrelated; at the same time, both are socially influenced. "Taste," writes Bourdieu, "is an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically" (1984 [1974]: 435). He is concerned with the manner in which taste is determined by social conditions, and how the sense of taste experiences a naturalization in its relationship to the body but also, it may be added, in its supposedly sensory evidence. But even if Bourdieu's observations about the social distinctions between culinary preferences take quite concrete sensory impressions into account, it should not be forgotten that he examines taste and its social shaping not only on the basis of practices of eating, and that he conceives of taste more in the sense of the formulation of an aesthetic evaluation that also lies beyond the boundaries of the culinary. The latter statement is also valid with respect to processes of naturalization and in situations where it is not a matter of a delicate sense of taste which lays claim for itself to a certain degree of reflection.

There is a huge amount of research literature that follows after Bourdieu's inquiry into food and focuses on the socio-cultural aspect of food and taste (see e.g. Geary 2020; Maguire 2018). A prominent position is occupied by the works of Antoine Hennion, who has worked extensively on taste (Hennion 2004, 2007), especially in the area of music sociology, but also concerning wine connoisseurs (Teil/Barrey/Floux/Hennion 2011). His prominence, however, is certainly also due to his central position at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation as well as to his critique of Bourdieu. Inasmuch as he therein turns his attention increasingly to connoisseurs and amateurs, the focus of the examinations shifts to the act of tasting/testing (Hennion 2017 [2010]: 117). The connoisseur is characterized by a delight in subtle response and by a specific sensitivity. This sensibility is the product of an effort consisting of continuous instances of trying out samples. It "is work done out of a tightly woven tissue of individual and collective past experiences which have built up the sensibility" (Hennion 2017 [2010]: 117).<sup>30</sup>

With a completely different theoretical background and without giving special consideration to the connoisseur, David Sutton argues partially in the same direction when he insists that in its tastefulness, food cannot be viewed independently of its interconnectedness, and he situates memory at the center of his deliberations. The contexts of food belong to its taste. Sutton formulates this insight by using the term *gustemology*. This means approaches "that organize their understanding of a wide spectrum of culture issues around taste and other sensory aspects of food" (Sutton 2010: 215; also Sutton 2011). The sensory element marks each respective point of departure, such as he exemplifies in reference to a study concerning sweetness by Mintz, who sees the sweetness of sugar as an inducement for the development of the moral concept of idleness and female cravings (Mintz 1996: 72–76; Sutton 2010: 212). In an exaggerated formulation: here taste does not experience a socio-cultural overlay; instead the act of tasting has socio-cultural effects inasmuch as connections – for example, to feminine cravings – are produced. Precisely these sorts of connections to a broad socio-cultural field prove to be of interest in the section *Sociality and Culturality of Food and Eating*, where in most cases the sensory aspect of food is focussed upon and serves as a point of departure.

The present anthology has been included in the *Open Library Medienwissenschaft*. We are extremely pleased about this distinction and the concomitant support. The volume goes back to a same-named conference that took place online in July 2021 under the auspices of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG). Here we would like

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30 See in this context also Jürgen Dollase (2006a), whose concern within the notion of culinary intelligence is precisely the development of this sensibility. He thereby formulates a program consisting of a training of the senses by deliberately producing various sensory impressions (Dollase 2006b).

to thank Sandra Socha, who played a crucial role in the organization and realization of the conference. An expression of gratitude also goes to David Hövelkröger for his support in assuring a frictionless effectuation of the online format. Rebecca Corrent was of great help in creating the manuscript. We would like to thank her as well. Special thanks to George Frederick Takis for his insightful English translation and proofreading of this introduction.

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