

My Eye is a Mouth

Spectacular Food for the Eyes

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Abstract *This paper examines the interplay of taste and visuality in dishes of European-style high cuisine, posing the following questions: Is the appearance of a dish important? Does it enhance the pleasure of eating? Or does it only distract from the central taste? Is the tongue decisive for the perception of a meal or is the eye even more important so as to allow culinary enjoyment without taste?*

In this paper, I will present the significance of the visual aspect for dishes of European-style high cuisine and show that culinary enjoyment is also possible without taste impressions. In the first part, I will deal with different aspects, all of which make clear that the appearance of food, the way it is arranged, and the viewing of food were already relevant centuries ago and not just since we have had worldwide access at any time to photographed food, which we look at and share with our mobile phones. There is a long tradition to the current omnipresence of food images which declare the eye to be the most important sensory organ for culinary enjoyment. In part two, I will use a comparative analysis as an example to show how revealing a purely visual analysis of a dish can be. For even if the dish is reduced to its appearance, this reveals a lot about its time of origin, and it also makes it possible to compare plated dishes across time and space. Finally, in the third part, I will look at an example that demonstrates the extent to which food is suitable for attracting attention via social media. I am less interested in an increased sensuality that evokes pleasure and enjoyment in the sense of classic food porn; instead, I want to show that food may function as a purely visual medium and is accordingly used by chefs in high cuisine to communicate with guests on site but also with digital followers. It is then about the concept and not the recipe – less about culinary details and more about ideas that the food conveys as a cultural medium (Bröcker 2021).

In the following discussion, I am always concerned with the dishes themselves and not with the photograph as a medium of its own. In this sense, the images are only a means to an end; the focus is on the chef as author, not on the photographer; hence the peculiarities of the images are not discussed.

1. Visual Cuisine

Today, cooking is often reduced to the eye, due to its visual dissemination in social media, books or magazines. To approach cooking visually seems misguided; after all, it's all about taste. So, it would be time to counter this trend and revalue taste as an essential sense, and to emphasize the uniqueness of culinary experiences instead of supporting this trend.¹ The predominance of the eye as the most important sense to perceive our environment is currently being questioned by various disciplines. Artists working with food are also working against such a hierarchy of the senses. For Dieter Roth, the mouth becomes the eye and Salvador Dali declares: "Beauty will be edible or it will not be at all." (Beil 2002: 58, 172)²

The fear that chefs could develop dishes not primarily to provide a special gustatory experience but for the eye or for distribution via visual media is shared by gourmets and chefs alike.³ But elements that appeal specifically to the sense of sight have always been part of culinary presentations and were deliberately placed in the center in order to impress visually. Already the Romans played with visual illusions while eating. Such trompe l'œils created visual expectations that were only revealed as misleading upon being tasted.⁴ This visual game has been implemented in many variations over the centuries and has also established itself in today's high cuisine.

In the Middle Ages, impressive buffet set-ups were created and elaborately designed entremets provided entertainment and amazement, without any taste qualities.

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- 1 Which is certainly done in philosophical treatises, e.g. in Perullo (2016) or Korsmeyer (1999).
 - 2 But the dominance of the eye is also questioned from a scientific perspective (<http://www.wissenschaft.de/gesellschaft-psychologie/die-hierarchie-der-sinne-2/>).
 - 3 Like Christian Bau, for example, who laments: "Due to the new media, a lot is now only about optics" (<https://www.welt.de/iconist/article144566974/Die-Wut-kocht-bei-Dreisterne-koch-Christian-Bau-mit.html>) or Michel Guérard: "I find it a little bit sad that for some the picture has become more important than the food itself" (<https://time.com/4661405/miche-l-guerard-michelin-stars/>). Critic Patricia Bröhm laments about dishes that seem to be designed by food stylists (<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/stil/essen-trinken/gault-millau-ehrt-di-e-besten-koeche-13902520.html>).
 - 4 In the Roman cookbook of Apicius (9th chapter, "The Sea", 13) a recipe is given for salt fish without salt fish, for which the livers of animals are formed into a fish (see Robert Maier (ed.), *Das römische Kochbuch des Apicius*). In the Middle Ages, there were dishes that were primarily for entertainment, so-called entremets, which often worked with visual illusions. For example, prepared animals were served in feathers (cp. Normore 2015: 23), and even later in Max Rumpolt's cookbook of 1581, p. LXX. There were also recipes for pies from which birds flew when cut open, as recommended by Robert May in his 1688 cookbook *The Accomplisht Cook* (see <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/texts/cook/1600s2/birdh/birds.html> (10.11.2018)). Even in 18th-century cookbooks, recipes for Lent recommend serving vegetables in sausage form (Pinkard 2009: 91).

The aim was to impress the table company, to display power and wealth; obviously, this was particularly well possible via visual stimuli. While taste perceptions and evaluations are considered highly individual, visual impressions are easier to share and perceive as a community. What is now done by many people at any time via social media used to be a privilege of wealthy rulers. But the principle remains: by displaying what I eat, I show who I am – or who I want to be taken for. For chefs nowadays, visual communication via food seems to be as important as the actual cooking, as I will show in part three; and it is well possible to do so, as I also demonstrate in part two.

In general, banquets were conceived as visual feasts; colorful dishes and elaborately prepared showpieces were important components of these productions.⁵

As late as the 18th century, there were elaborately produced *pièces montées*, culinary sculptures made primarily for the eye. Today, professional competitions still require the creation of show plates and buffet sculptures that are not eaten.⁶

The eye has always been part of the meal, and while in the past this provided additional animation for the people at and around the tables, today the visual perception of a meal, digitally or via books, often replaces, enhances, anticipates or relives multi-sensory enjoyment on the spot. Criticism of this culinary spectacle is also nothing new at all. Chefs, diners, critics or gastronomic theorists have been discussing for centuries whether taste should be the focus or to what extent the eye may also be addressed. While the differentiation and intensification of the taste of the dishes is understood as an integral part of the chef's craftsmanship, a culinary art that is too focused on externals is perceived as misguided.

Advocates of taste-oriented cuisine despise decorative elements and advocate a culinary art that concentrates on the essential and does not seek to impress with visual effects, but rather works with convincing taste images based on craftsmanship. Antonin Carême (1784–1833) is a famous advocate of a cuisine that does not concentrate on taste alone. His contemporary Antoine Beauvilliers (1754–1817) contradicted this view: "... the task of the cook is to flatter the palate, not the eye, not to fill leisure hours, but the stomach." (Mennell 1988: 196)

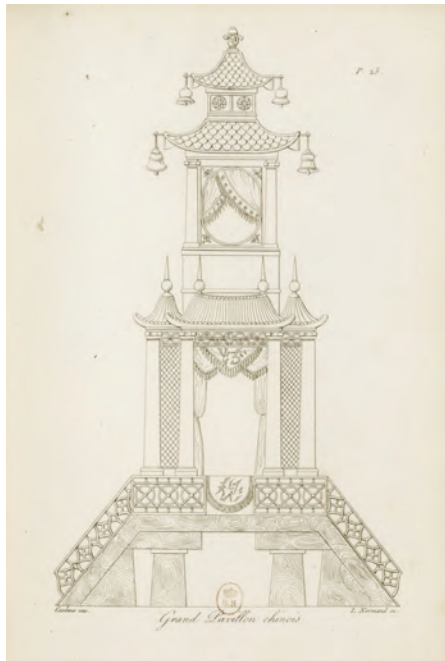
Even if chefs repeatedly emphasize the taste of their food or speak out against the cult of the visual in the kitchen, today, encouraged by elaborately designed cookery art books as well as by audio-visual and social media, food is consumed visually

5 Titles like *A Feast for the Eyes* (Normore 2015) or *The Appetite and the Eye* (Wilson/Brears 1992) stress the importance of the eye for medieval cuisine.

6 IKA – Culinary Olympics: this competition still involves the creation of show plates. It is only since 2020 that plates for direct consumption have been prepared instead of cold show plates, but showpieces are still exhibited, and vegetables are carved (see www.ahgz.de/gastronomie/news/-chefs-table-loest-plattenschau-als-publikumsmagnet-ab-258534; http://www.olympiade-der-koeche.com/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Individual-Artistic-sculptures-D_GB_IKA2020.pdf).

more than ever. Well-known restaurants are visited by many diners; but the number of those who experience the restaurant visually – digitally via social media or analogue via cookbooks or magazines – is far higher.⁷ The worldwide exchange about cooking – about styles, dishes, restaurants, the entire gastronomic discourse – does not take place directly at the dining table, but rather via digital and analogue media.⁸ The eye not only eats first; it is also much more voracious than our mouth and devours vast amounts of culinary data. In the words of Dieter Roth: “My eye is a mouth.” (Beil 2002: 172)

Fig. 1: Antonin Carême, sketch for a Pièce montée.



Source: Antonin Carême: *Le Pâtissier Pittoresque*, Paris 1815, gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

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- 7 This is also shown, for example, by the reservation requests for world-famous restaurants such as El Bulli. In one year, about one million requests were matched by 8,000 available seats (Prats/Quintanilla/Mitchell 2008).
- 8 As numerous magazines, podcasts, blogs, documentaries, social media accounts or platforms like Reddit or eGullet confirm.

Culinary analyses based on pictures are nothing new either. Many examples show that it is possible and rewarding to analyze plated dishes like paintings as a visual medium.

Roland Barthes analyzed pictures of food in *Elle* magazine under the heading “Ornamental Cookery” (Barthes 1991: 78).⁹ Barthes formulated insights into society, based on the culinary staging of food. He thus applies Lévi-Strauss’ consideration of the significance of cuisine with regard to the constitution of a society to images of this cuisine. Indeed, many advantages arise from a purely visual approach. This is what makes comparisons of plated dishes across time and place possible in the first place. What André Malraux describes as the “imaginary museum,” which makes it possible to compare works of art via photographs, is of even greater significance for culinary art, since the ephemeral character of the works is overcome, at least for the realm of the visual (Malraux 1994). The apparent lack of being able to look only at the outward appearance of a dish can prove to be an advantage. Photography makes it possible to concentrate entirely on the visual aspect. In addition, the food, taken out of the context of the eating situation, is unified. This is helpful in terms of a comparative view. What is otherwise, appetizingly designed, intended for immediate consumption can be extensively viewed and analyzed in a photograph. The immediate enjoyment gives way to a distanced theoretical classification.

Analyzing food on the basis of visual characteristics is a useful way of dealing with dishes and, despite the proverbial controversial taste, of verbalizing peculiarities. Taste needs visualization, so photographs of food provide a vivid basis for talking about visual design and using it as a starting point to explore intentions and meanings. The important role of photographs is also evident in cookery books, which are now published in large formats and with elaborate visual material. Digital culinary discourse, as already described, also takes place through images. In both cases, food is deliberately staged to compensate for a lack of sensory impressions, which can ultimately have an effect on the design of culinary works, because they are not only intended to convince not only the eater, but increasingly or once again also the secondary viewer. Both elaborately decorated plates from a kitchen that seeks to be visually convincing as well as simple plates that are reduced to the supposedly essential are suitable for an image analysis.

When analyzing pictorial representations of food, it is not necessary to dispense with references to the ostensibly most important sense involved in eating, because the eye does not only eat in such a way that we are also visually delighted. Rather, the visual impression is constitutive for or retroactive to taste. The visible appearance of a dish creates expectations that influence the taste experience. Famous ev-

9 In this book he also deals with the cultural meaning of beefsteak and French fries. On food he also published “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption” (1997 [1961]) and compares the arrangement of food with a painting in *Empire of Signs* (1992, 11).

idence for this assumption is a study for which white wines were colored red. Oenologists then described the taste of what were actually white wines with attributes that are typical of red wines (Morrot/Brochet/Dubourdieu 2001). In general, the eye is said to be predominant, so that in the case of contradictory perceptions of mouth and eye, the visual perception is decisive for the assessment (Spence 2014: 260). The eye often sets an analysis in motion and opens up spaces of experience, so to speak, within which the judgements made via smell and ultimately taste usually move. Ingredients and preparation methods are registered and, based on previous experiences, determine the expectation of the taste experience. Different taste variations also announce themselves visually: colors, for example, convey information about the degree of ripeness and freshness of a product or indicate the intensity of the frying aromas. Last but not least, the way a dish is arranged determines how it can be eaten and in what proportions the arranged elements are perceived. Many chefs or experienced diners can recall or anticipate a taste experience from illustrations, as they are able to translate all the visual characteristics of a dish into taste sensations. The illustration is then like a score that can be read. While it is important to acknowledge the relevance of the traditionally neglected close senses, the influence of the senses of distance cannot be denied. Even less can the field of cooking be reduced to the sensory perception of tasting. In this sense, visual perception, despite its superficial approach, will be used here to understand conceptual elements of high cuisine beyond more sensual aspects of taste that are usually focused on.

As an example, I will look at two dishes that are separated by about 100 years. The first dish, "Filet de Boeuf à la Moderne" by Auguste Escoffier (1846–1935), is typical for many changes that Escoffier brought about and is described in his *Guide Culinaire* of 1903 (200, 359) and prepared and illustrated according to his instructions in *L'Art Culinaire Français* of 1957.

In the case of Escoffier's dish, I am going back to a representation that was realized according to his specifications but not taken from his own cookbook, which was published with almost no illustrations. Nevertheless, Escoffier also thinks of the dish visually; the original recipe gives hints on how to arrange the dish, and Escoffier himself writes about the arrangement in his *Guide Culinaire*: "La question du dressage a une importance presque égale à celle de l'exécution pratique, et ceci n'est pas une idée paradoxale." (Escoffier 1903: 345)¹⁰

The second dish, "Vegetable Field" by René Redzepi, is taken from his 2010 book *Noma Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine* (120). Both chefs left their mark on the cuisine of their time, and their work had a decisive influence on the development of European high cuisine.

10 English translation: "The question of dressing is of almost the same importance as is that of practical execution – and this is absolutely not an empty assertion."

The photos are only a means to an end for this analysis. It is not about the arrangement of the photo, but only about the food shown there. By analyzing the way the food is arranged, the ingredients and the way it is prepared, I want to show that it is possible to draw conclusions about the time and the social values of that era. In the sense of Peter Kubelka: “A dish must express the spirit of the times. A dish cannot lie.” (Riedel 2016)

It is about a level of meaning beyond the actual taste. About concepts that are conveyed through food. Taste is only interesting if it is relevant to the concept in addition to enjoyment. As indicated in part one, taste aspects can also be discussed via appearance; but in contrast to an actual tasting, only limited things can be said about it.

2. Visual Analysis of Dishes

Auguste Escoffier: “Filet de Boeuf à la Moderne”

(This dish is arranged on a platter and served table side *à la russe* for about ten persons)

Fig. 2: Auguste Escoffier, Filet de Boeuf à la Moderne.



Source: Ali Bab et al.: *L'Art Culinaire Français*, Paris 1957, pp. 384/408. © Flammarion.

A large piece of beef forms the central focus. This expresses a hierarchy of products. The most important element, usually the most expensive product that determines the dish, is placed in the centre. Everything else is a side dish.

Meat is traditionally an expression of (male) power and wealth. Here it is the fillet, the “best” or most tender and expensive piece of the animal. Eating meat was reserved for the wealthy sections of the population for centuries. The plate is symmetrical, and the clear structure of the accompanying elements additionally emphasizes the sliced meat in the middle. They surround the main product and point to the center in a star shape. The meat is “embedded” by vegetables and veal dumplings on the plate, which form the frame for the main product. The vegetables are artfully *tournéed*. The natural product is cut to size and thus cultivated. In this, the staging takes up the self-image of Baroque table culture, which emphasizes the dominance of man over nature in its symmetrical presentation. Sliced truffles lie on top of the small vegetable towers. In this form, they are reduced in contrast to the lavish use that was common in earlier times, but they still stand as a traditional ingredient of French high cuisine for a luxurious dish. The dumplings are adorned with an ornamental decoration. They are trimmed, cured calf’s tongue. The great expense is evident in the fine workmanship. This kind of cooking is not done at home. It requires larger kitchen teams, which Escoffier reorganized with his brigade system, a measure that still ensures high efficiency in kitchens today. Intense yet natural colors have an appealing effect and indicate the processing of the products. Blanching preserves and intensifies the colors of the vegetables. The meat is perfectly cooked *à point*. When cut open, the pink core is revealed. This is where the kitchen demonstrates its precision craftsmanship. It is pink through and through, or still slightly bloody towards the centre, and has no visible cooking gradient. If done improperly, the meat is cooked through by intense heat from the outside, which would result in a grey edge. On the outside, a deep brown coloring promises intense roasted aromas. The fillet has been tied, which gives it a uniform shape. This is not only for visual reasons, because bridging facilitates even cooking. Another detail is the white dots on the upper edge of the beef fillet. These are strips of bacon. They serve to increase juiciness and prevent possible drying-out during searing. The so-called larding is a classic method that is hardly used today. Newer techniques make it possible to cook the meat without drying it out because the heat supply can be regulated precisely. Another central element of *grande cuisine* is the sauce, which is served *à part*. You can already tell the quality by its gloss and color. Dark and dense, the sauce promises an intensity of flavor that is achieved by boiling it down for a long time. During the reduction process, all the aromas are condensed and the water evaporates. Such a sauce is very expensive because it is reduced to a small quantity. The dish is served on a silver platter for several people, as is usual for service *à la Russe*: the waiter shows the platter and places some of its contents on the guest’s plate, or does this at the side table, the *guéridon*, after the platter has been shown to the guests. The guest is thereby

first visually introduced to the dish. The way the dish is arranged and presented on a silver platter emphasizes the luxury of an upscale restaurant and, together with the rules of behavior that apply there, stands for a differentiated process of civilization when eating in company (Elias 2000: 139). The spatial staging of a restaurant also functions through the eye: luxurious furnishings, silver cutlery, etc. render the luxury of the aristocracy tangible for the middle classes. In view of earlier forms of presentation, which included whole animals or parts of animals, this form of staging is simple. In contrast to previous staging strategies, e.g. of the Middle Ages, there is no opulent display. The decoration has been simplified considerably. The focus is on the edible part of the animal. Escoffier writes: “...nous établissons en principe formel que toute surcharge inutile on doit être proscrite, que toute addition en dehors des éléments que comportent les mets en doit être écartée; qu’elle doit être régie par une simplicité de Bon goût, et ne plus être cause de pertes de temps inutiles.” (1903: 346)¹¹

Reduction to the essential also plays an important role in other areas. The architect Adolf Loos links culinary development with modern architecture and writes in 1908 in *Ornament and Crime* (280)¹²:

The representative of the ornament believes that my urge for simplicity is tantamount to mortification. No, dear professor from the school of arts and crafts, I do not mortify myself! It tastes better to me that way. The show dishes of past centuries, all with ornaments to make peacocks, pheasants and lobsters seem tastier have the opposite effect on me. I walk through a culinary art exhibition with horror when I should be thinking I should be eating these stuffed animal corpses. I eat roast beef.¹³

In contrast to Escoffier’s then comparatively modern dish is the following, which about 100 years later became a signature dish of New Nordic Cuisine and thus represents important aspects of this cuisine.

11 English translation: “...we are also in favor, on principle, of keeping out all foreign elements that distort the dish and of wasting no useless time. The preparation should be based on a simplicity that shows good taste.”

12 The name *à la moderne* perfectly fits these ideas.

13 Escoffier’s most important work, *Le Guide Culinnaire*, appeared in 1903, just five years before Loos’ text.

René Redzepi: “Vegetable Field”

(This dish is one plate for one person and part of a multi-course tasting menu)

Fig. 3: René Redzepi, Vegetable Field.



Source: René Redzepi: *Noma*, New York 2010, p. 120. Photo: Ditte Isager.

Vegetables form the centerpiece and are staged as if they were served unprocessed. It is still in the ‘earth,’ which refers to its direct proximity to nature. The product is seemingly at the center of the dish in its untouched form. This negates the cook as author. The cook normally carries out all the work steps after the harvest: washing, cleaning, peeling, cooking, seasoning. The dish is not arranged on a plate but is served on a stone, which reinforces the natural impression. Earth and stone stand for the terroir, for the region that determines the taste of the dish (Hermansen 2012).

Although New Nordic Cuisine proclaims a cuisine close to nature and sometimes serves ingredients in an almost unprocessed state, this self-image becomes a visual gesture here. What looks natural and simple is the result of an elaborate working process. Compared to a plate of vegetables in a normal restaurant, this arrangement

is extremely labor-intensive. For this dish, it is precisely what appears simple that is highly elaborate. What nature represents is a signifier of high culinary culture. The imitation of a natural situation shows mimetic aspects of cooking. The arrangement of vegetables as a field translates a familiar image into a dish. The transfer of certain 'images of nature' has become a theme in its own right in contemporary gastronomy. Once again, in a very direct, playful and almost kitschy manner, it reveals the desire to create a cuisine in harmony with nature. The mimetic has a long tradition. Even medieval presentations showing birds in feathers imitate the living animal on the one hand, and also associate the food with its original state on the other. But when it comes to bringing the environment of the restaurant, its region as an essential point of reference for the cuisine, onto the plate or the stone, there are other role models from more recent kitchen history. Michel Bras' (*1946) dish *Gargouillou* from 1980 is an important influence in this respect.¹⁴ Vegetables and herbs are also central there. This is unusual in the context of high cuisine, where proteins are traditionally an integral part of a dish. Neither in Bras' nor in Redzepi's dishes do the vegetables correspond to classic cut shapes; moreover, they are not arranged strictly symmetrically but are organically distributed. In Bras' case, the idea of depicting the environment is already present in the staging of the food, but it remains more abstract in its implementation. Later Albert Adrià (*1969) made bringing landscapes onto the plate as an image of nature a subject that has been imitated many times. In his book *Naturà*, published in 2008, he made this consideration the theme of sweet cuisine and designed desserts inspired by nature (Adrià 2008).

An important model for a cuisine that brings the environment onto the plate through seasonal and regional ingredients and also incorporates natural materials is Japanese cuisine, specifically *kaiseki*, the high cuisine of Japan. Japanese *kaiseki* also captivates through the apparent simplicity of the dishes. In this respect, an already existing development is continued but is at the same time updated and radicalized. Radicalized because New Nordic Cuisine does not take place in France or refer to the regions there, which have a special reputation among gourmets, but to the region of Denmark and the North, a terra incognita for gourmets. This signature dish seems to capture an entire generation and its zeitgeist. Vegetables instead of meat, original and simple products instead of luxury and ostentation. High cuisine is making a U-turn that redefines pleasure and luxury. A kitchen that flaunts luxury is being replaced by one that stands for a new simplicity, or at least for new values. With regard to the spatial staging, this also applies to the design of the restaurant. The furnishings of Noma do not correspond to classic notions of luxury – silverware, chandeliers, tablecloths – but instead rely on natural materials: bare wooden tables,

14 See Bras' website: <https://www.bras.fr/en/page-article/en-the-gargouillou-of-young-vegetables> (14.10.2022).

earthy warm tones, and furniture in the tradition of Scandinavian design. This appears simple and unpretentious; but due to the handcrafted production, it is definitely exclusive and, like the food, stands for a new definition of luxury.

There are already clear visual contrasts with Escoffier's dishes: The product hierarchy disappears; there is no arrangement according to product value. Which also reflects a society that strives for openness and is less characterized by irreconcilable differences. The typical center, the main product, which classically includes protein in the form of fish or meat, is completely absent. The dish is the focal point in its entirety; no single element is emphasized. The organic presentation does not attempt to stage the creator as the ruler over nature; instead, a symbiosis with nature is sought. Ornamental decoration gives way to a 'naturalness' in which the vegetable retains its original form and does not appear to have been refined. It is good the way it is and is allowed to be completely itself. Instead of a silver serving plate, a stone is used as a natural plate, which reinforces the intention of untouched nature and suggests simplicity. What is there, or what nature produces at the moment, is used. The human intervention is obvious in Escoffier's work, whereas in Redzepi's it recedes into the background. Redzepi's dish is emblematic of a time when people seek closeness to nature and want to live in symbiosis with it.¹⁵

3. The Visual Staging of Food

Chefs like Redzepi have perfected the use of visual gestures and thus serve not only the guests in the restaurant, but also a large international community of followers.¹⁶ Not only beautiful dishes are served, but dishes that appeal to our visual memory in a special way and awaken associations. Dishes as visual media are very well-suited to provoke, to trigger controversy and thus to generate attention. These can be real ants, replicas of beetles and butterflies or the perfect staging of a duck's brain.¹⁷ The utilization of offal as part of the 'nose to tail' trend is not a new invention. Many regional cuisines traditionally utilize all parts of an animal, and this includes lungs or brains. Today, however, consumption is no longer a matter of course, and accordingly Redzepi chooses a staging that elevates such a dish to an extraordinary challenge. The presentation of the duck's brain as part of the "Duck Feast" dish, which is served in the open head of the animal (fig. 4), evokes associations that evoke feelings

15 Cp. the cover of *Time Magazine* of March 26, 2012, on which Redzepi is described as a "locavore hero" and can be seen kneeling in a green meadow with a knitted jumper and rubber boots (<http://content.time.com/time/covers/europe/o,16641,20120326,00.html>).

16 René Redzepi and his restaurant Noma each have one million followers.

17 Cp. Instagram profile of René Redzepi (<https://www.instagram.com/reneredzeginoma/?hl=de>).

such as disgust and stylizes the eating of these innards into an act of overcoming. The target group of cosmopolitan foodies will probably be familiar with the pop-cultural allusions to films such as *Indiana Jones* or *Hannibal*. In *Indiana Jones*, a monkey's brain, also in the animal's skull, is served for dessert, which – courtesy dictates – should be eaten by the guests (fig. 5). The own and the foreign become very clear here through culturally defined enjoyment. In *Hannibal*, it is a cannibalistic predilection that leads to a macabre scene. Hannibal Lecter prepares the brain of his victim, who is sitting at the table with his head open and shares this treat with him (fig. 6). By referencing such depictions, *Duck Feast* becomes a cleverly staged banquet that playfully leads to or crosses the boundaries of one's own realm of pleasure.

Fig. 4: René Redzepi, Noma, Duck Feast.



Source/Photo: Anders Husa: *Review: Noma's Game & Forest Season, 2018* (<https://andershusa.com/nomas-game-forest-season-the-best-and-most-provocative-season/>).

Through special ingredients but also through an appropriate staging, the regional cuisine of Noma becomes an eerily exotic spectacle that can unfold its effect in the restaurant as well as on social channels. Somewhat less excitingly but just as effectively, Sota Atsumi (1987) at the Clown Bar in Paris served a calf's brain that has been carefully processed and thus clearly shows what it is (Fig. 7).

Fig. 5 (left): Steven Spielberg, still from Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, 1984.



Fig. 6 (right): Ridley Scott, still from Hannibal, 2001.



Source: © Paramount Pictures/Lucasfilm (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNZ63iwnn5M>). Source: © MGM/Universal Pictures (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibfBDKiwiac>).

Fig. 7: Sota Atsumi, Clown Bar, Cerveille de Veau.



Source/Photo: Felix Bröcker, 2017.

In both cases it becomes clear that the saying “You eat with your eyes first” is not a platitude. Taste in its complexity goes beyond what is perceived on the tongue. The head (or brain!) also plays an important role. The same ingredient in a sausage would

trigger far less reaction in the eater. The staging of a dish, i.e. the visual impression, helps to determine the taste and makes it possible to use food as a visual medium. Anyone who wants to increase the enjoyment of digital or even analogue food should therefore look closely and not miss out on the potential of the visual enjoyment of food.

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