Aesthetic Practice
The series is edited by Nicolaj van der Meulen and Jörg Wiesel | Volume I
Nicolaj van der Meulen, Jörg Wiesel (eds.)

Culinary Turn
Aesthetic Practice of Cookery

in collaboration with Anneli Käsmayr
and in editorial cooperation with Raphaela Reinmann
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The present book is the first of a series that will be brought out in coming years by transcript Verlag and which we have entitled “Aesthetic Practice”. The intention is not only to explore the epistemic potential of aesthetic practices in art, design and related fields, but also to dovetail aesthetic practices and the associated discourses that are otherwise carefully distinguished from one another as systemic units in society and often co-exist more or less in isolation. If in this regard we construe objects and processes as the embodiment of knowledge, and knowledge itself as an object and process, then in the volumes in this series we will address the question of how a concept of knowledge can be better consolidated and advanced beyond purely language-based concepts. We believe that it would be promising to return to and make productive use of the concept of critique as an act of differentiating, assessing and suspending final judgments, among others taking our cue from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. We wish hereby to develop the concept of critique dialogically as a critique of art, culture and taste. We proceed from the assumption that the discourse itself, be it in the form of lectures, dialogues, seminars, or performances constitutes aesthetic practice. Aesthetic practice can be fostered performatively along the interfaces and nodes of social systems, be it in the form of hybrid authorship or as an admixture of individuals, media and discourses. If only because it is suitable for bridging the hiatus of theory and practice.

For the current volume on the “Culinary Turn. Aesthetic Practice of Cookery” we have selected different genres of texts and images that cast a bright light on the social fields of cookery, food and nutrition – as discourses, treatises, recipes, confessions, assertions, conversations, and definitions of positions. If we have assembled the texts and images under the heading of a “culinary turn”, then it is not to claim that we seek to prove this or that theory or hypothesis. However, our intention is to bring together in a volume those text and image genres that would not normally be encountered in one and the same book because they originate in different discourses and practices. If one considers the topic of cookery as broadly as possible, then the discourses and practices relating to it seem so complex as to prevent them being boiled down to a single common denominator. The resulting heterogeneity is thus intentional or at least conceded.
The term “culinary turn” is chosen to express a broad social turn towards questions of food, of cooking and nutrition, one driven by a new proximity of cooking and eating to cultural techniques in art and design. A key indicator of the “culinary turn” is not only how cookery and food are spilling over into other walks of life, but also the related emergence of paradoxes. Thus, the “culinary turn” is formulated as genuineness and authenticity that functions as a counter program to a digitalized, connected and globalized world, although both qualities have first to be constructed and staged. And where it lays claim to independence and a “more genuine genuineness”, its content still derives from the relationship to a community from which it distinguishes itself but which it needs to be able to develop authentically in the first place. The slightly overweight TV chef-lecturers have given way to athletic tattooed doers in their best years. However, the seedbed for the “culinary turn” are less the artists or cooks, and above all those who move across the system boundaries: the amateurs, hipsters, cultural scholars that publish their own cookbooks, creative hobby cooks, curators, and authors of culinary and rural magazines, not to mention their subscribers. Their flag is the curly kale.

The idea for the present volume arose in the context of the preparations for the research project, now supported by the Swiss National Fund, on “Cooking and Eating as Aesthetic Practice”. One of the triggers for the research project was the encounter with Swiss chef Stefan Wiesner. He had converted a barn in the rear courtyard of his inn, the Rössli in Escholzmatt/Entlebuch, into an experimental lab. Alongside a kitchen, the lab is chock-a-block with books, old and new tools, apocryphal spices, plant essences, aromas and countless woods, some of them several thousand years old. From here, Stefan Wiesner heads off into the countryside close at hand to discover ingredients for his thematic gourmet menus. The latest of these, called “Nature speaks”, is made up of 14 units: water, earth, fire, air, sun, brook, wood, flame, wind, Big Bang, metal, soil, stone, ash. The tenth course, the “Big Bang”, is composed as follows: “Salt crucible sounded at 108 Hz, covered with a Chioggia beet in pink pepper water, carrot mousse with rose-water, carrot greens jelly, black Palatinate beet chips, violet Palatinate beet straw, black salsify in caramel nutmeg milk, yellow beet with sweet-sour pimento, parsley root from the smoker with juniper, parsnip candied with walnut, celeriac with a crust of salted thyme, kohlrabi with coriander in wine vinegar, sunflower root with clementine leaves, oat root in laurel-cheese water, yam root parboiled, root of chervil in alcohol and Szechuan pepper 50 Hz”. Wiesner explains the history behind each course with great precision and explains the thinking behind them.

Well before the triumphant march of Nordic cuisine, in fact for over 25 years, Stefan Wiesner has been exploring the various substances in the world, in part as a counter to so-called molecular cuisine, in order to transform them in culinary terms. When we first spoke with him, at the end of 2013, Wiesner commented: “If a chef learned under me then he

1 | See Menke: 1996, pp. 198–201 on authenticity.
must be able to analyze an Art Deco clock such that he can derive a recipe from it." The typography of the clock face, the materiality of the casing and clockwork, the stylistic and social conditions of the epoch when the clock was made all lead to certain recipe ideas as regards the choice of components and cooking technique that Wiesner then develops through sketches. Put differently: The clock gets cooked, in part directly using components such as gold or leather. Stefan Wiesner is therefore not bragging when he says: "I can actually serve a dish on any topic. You simply have to state the topic." What we can see here is a specific interpretation of cooking as a symbiosis of art, craftsmanship and experience in which the focus is not only on cooking tasty dishes, but on using cooking as a way to analyze the world and transform it into a gustatory experience. In this way, and in part for the very first time, things get grasped in culinary terms. Understood in this light, cooking constitutes an aesthetic practice that seeks a dialogue with other artistic practices, with nature and with our stocks of knowledge of the world. While the path taken by artistic Modernism can obviously be read as a path from figuration to abstraction, the path of a history of cooking probably runs the other way: It starts with pure material, as it were with the abstraction of essences, and from there increasingly moves towards the figurative and to representational concepts. This explains why an entire carrot or meat on a bone has become more important than mash, tartar, pie dough and free aromas: On a plate prepared by Stefan Wiesner landscapes, objects and abstract entities are raised to the level of culinary representation. Those who sit down to a Stefan Wiesner gourmet menu may well be profoundly touched by tastes that they have never experienced before or that reach back into the depths of childhood and in a strange way interlink the past and future in the present. At this level cooking can clearly be understood as a speculative practice which, unlike its most recent equivalent, the "speculative turn", is able to reach practical conclusions from the precedence of the world over human thought.

The present volume is subdivided into five chapters or episodes: kitchen, production, concept, discourse and perception. The kitchen chapter (Krausse/Leinfelder/von Mende, Regan, Rützler/Reiter, Surmann, Wiesner) brings together historical, political and social perspectives on the culinary theme. The conversation with Stefan Wiesner has been placed at the beginning, as it is key to the concept and thrust of this book. The production chapter (Bartha, de La Falaise, Flammer, Home/Oehen, Stromberg) contains fundamental angles on the agricultural, botanical and socio-economic preconditions of the current aspects of cuisine that focus on diversity and regionality. They also show how the latter two aspects have become cultural and social paradigms. The chapter concept gets its teeth into the conceptual richness of cooking and into the biographical-narrative dimensions of ingredients and aromas. Anneli Käsmayr picked constituents that make sense in terms of cooking practice (meats, vegetables, fats, acids, herbs and salt), to which Samuel Herzog responded with narrative frames. Then chefs and artists (Alhäuser, Clopath, de La Falaise, dilettantin produktionsbüro, Froelich, Frühsammer, Wiesner) were invited to respond to
the chosen constituents with drafts of recipes. In this episode, we sought above all to vividly emphasize the variance of culinary design practices as aesthetic practices while also visualizing the roots of the gustatory experience in biographically informed memories. The discourse chapter (Bonino, Bröcker, Knecht, Martinez, Vilgis, Wiesel) highlights the extension of cookery to other cultural domains. A key thrust of the perception chapter (Dollase, International Gastronautical Society, Studer, van der Meulen, Vilgis/Käsmayr, Waldenfels) is to foreground aspects of enjoyment and aesthetic perception as opposed to the customary social discourse framing of “health, sustainability and ethics”. Among other things, the stress will be placed on exploring phenomenological aspects of the gustatory and its close links to other levels of sensory experience. This volume is concluded by a full bibliography on the subject. We included all references of the contributions, which are of a general interest in view of the culinary turn topic. If a reference is short cited within the contributions, the reader will find the detailed title in the full biography at the end of the book.

The present volume sets out to try and highlight the differences in the approaches derived from theory and practice and thus also to treat the two as equally valid. Over and above the afore-mentioned chapters, a number of images are scattered through the book (Kobe Desramault, Lucky Peach). We want in this way not only to emphasize the key role that the iconic and the visual play in the current discourse on the “culinary turn” (e.g., the different publications on theme brought out by Phaidon Press or in magazines such as “Alla Carta” or in food blogs such as My New Roots, Julie’s Kitchen), but also take the perspective of aesthetic practice to offset the predominance of linguistic approaches to the subject.

Should this volume manage to reach readers in a broad variety of disciplines and areas of society and succeed in fostering dialogues across all dining tables, cuisines, museums, restaurants, desktops, libraries and digital networks, and if it moreover triggers debate, discourses and contradiction, then it will have achieved its objective.

Nicolaj van der Meulen/Jörg Wiesel, February 2017
Introduction

Nicolaj van der Meulen and Jörg Wiesel

The kitchen and cooking have emerged as important differentiated cultural fields in the 21st century. Alongside their important role in the natural and nutritional sciences, they are also in the focus of culinary studies, design, art, gastronomy and agriculture. The heyday of issues of nutrition to which this attests contrasts with the “crisis of food” some have discerned and an increasing divergence between nutritional wishes and nutritional realities.

Recent artistic approaches respond to this paradox with cooking and food projects. Unlike the “Eat Art” movement or the use of foods in the context of artistic works, since about 2004 a number of artistic positions have arisen on the line dividing art and design, agriculture, gardening and gastronomy. The discussion now hinges not on a more limited understanding of “food in art” but on broader issues of food, cooking, agriculture and nutrition.

There is an interesting equivalent in more recent gastronomy to this new turn from art and design toward cooking and eating: By way of advancing “Nouvelle Cuisine” and “Molecular Cookery”, a culinary practice has evolved that focuses on “regionality”, “seasonality” and “culinary traditions”, and it has already been labelled “Nova Regio Cuisine”. It derives from an analytical study of rural areas and the interest in turning nature into something you can cook at a broader level by means of special cooking techniques. Chefs such as René Redzepi and Stefan Wiesner run their own archives and laboratories to this end. Selection processes, transformations of materials, and the scope for contingency when developing recipes all point to culinary “experimental systems”.

On 20 February 2014 Swiss Confederate Councilor Johann Schneider-Amman opened the touring exhibition “Wir essen die Welt” (“We eat the world”) in the Confederate Polit-Forum; the successful show can still be viewed. Organized by HELVETAS it addresses the themes of “enjoyment, business and globalization” and discusses the changing socio-political
relevance of nutrition. At almost the same tie, several exhibitions explored
the question of healthy nutrition (Vevey in 2015; Marseille in 2014-5; Linz
in 2014-5; Cape Town in 2016) and the importance of eating and food in art
and design (Eindhoven in 2013; Wolfsburg in 2013-4; Bergisch Gladbach
in 2014-5). The success of TV cooking shows, food trucks, elaborately
designed cookery, gastronomic and culinary books and blogs,5 the growing
significance of the kitchen as a design task (through to the “Moley Kitchen”
in the age of IoT) and the ever greater attention paid to celebrity chefs given
the status of artists, all point the great social interest in nutritional habits
and the alimentary practices of preparing food.

Hypothetically, one could speak of a culinary turn, although the strong
public interest thus expressed in questions of cookery and eating, as well
as the discussion of central social questions such as sustainability, health
and nutrition contrast with the “crisis in food” some have diagnosed.6 In
numerous countries there is evidence of growing dissatisfaction among
consumers with their own food and the quality of life, which can be
attributed to external constraints (flexibility, mobility) and the wish in
society for healthy nutrition, as covered by the media.7 Complete nutrition
such as “Soylent” (and the related discourses) are one expression of this
crisis. They strip citizens of any personal responsibility, but come with
the price of purely physiological intake bereft of any culinary enjoyment.
Assuming a culinary turn politics and society face the paradoxical challenge
of balancing the strong wish for a creative and joyful culture of food with
the crisis in nutritional realities and the hunger for pragmatic solutions.

The wealth of magazines,8 columns, blogs, books and TV shows
devoted to things culinary is a strong indication for the virulent debate in
contemporary culture on issues of nutrition. This also reflects the swiftly
changing culture of cooking and nutrition – in a medium- or genre-spe-
cific way. Swiss writers Dominik Flammer and Sylvan Müller have studied
the “culinary heritage of the Alps”, not only analyzing how individual
farmers, breeders, fishermen, cooks and restaurant owners contribute to
maintaining culinary diversity, but also considering cross-border “taste”
as a response to a hard-to-define need for “genuineness, credibility and
authenticity”.9 In Pippa Lord’s Foodblog “Sous Style”, people present the
dishes they create in their own homes. In Despina Stokou’s blog “Bpigs”
(2009) recipes are posted for the illicit participation in a dinner for
Matthew Barney and Elizabeth Peyton. Chef Mina Stone has together with
artist Urs Fischer developed a cookery book called “Cooking for Artists”

derultimativekochblog.com; http://www.whatkatieate.com
8 | King/Williams: 2014.
9 | Flammer/Müller: 2013b, pp. 10, 16.