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Critical food design: Between utility and values

Abstract: This paper takes as its starting point the distinction that Stanisław Pietraszko drew between the natural world and the human world, with the division of the latter into the orders of civilization, society, and culture. In the human world, food and eating as a form of meeting natural needs are located in the order of civilization, and as an activity that exemplifies and expresses values, they are inscribed in the order of culture. Critical food design undertakings that transcend the pragmatics of nutrition are analyzed in order to illumine the possible intersections of the useful and the cultural, where culture is understood as “a mode of life by the values.”

Keywords: food design, critical food design, culinary culture, civilization, aesthetics, values

If satisfying our hunger as such binds us with and to the natural world, the way we actually do it determines our distinctiveness as a species. Claude Lévi-Strauss insisted that cooking and speaking were two markers of the special position of humans in the world of nature. As he explicitly elucidated: “[C]ooking [...], it has never been sufficiently emphasized, is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food.”¹ Another anthropologist, Richard Wrangham, has famously posited that cooking in fact produced culture.² Similar observations have been offered by Felipe Fernández-Armesto, who explains: “Culture begins when the raw gets cooked. The campfire becomes a place of communion when people eat around it. Cooking is not just a way of

¹ C. Lévi-Strauss, “The culinary triangle,” transl. P. Brooks, [in:] *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds. C. Counihan, P. van Esterik, New York 2003, p. 36.

² R. Wrangham, *Catching Fire: How Food Made Us Human*, New York 2009.

preparing food but of organizing society around communal meals and predictable mealtimes.”³ Cooking may set us apart from other animals, but the question is whether this is enough to locate food and eating within the order of culture.

Indeed, the answer to this question appears evident; however, its obviousness evaporates as soon as we ponder it from the perspective of cultural studies as understood by Stanisław Pietraszko. On his take, “the human world” is separate from “the natural world” and consists of three relatively autonomous orders: of society, of civilization, and of culture, which differ from each other in the respective “agentive factors” that govern each of them. The order of society is regulated by duties, the order of civilization by utility, and the order of culture by values. Utility is associated with practical aims and is essentially functional. As opposed to utility, values are fundamentally autotelic.⁴ In this model, culture is conceived as free from practical duties and defined as “a mode of life by the values.”⁵ The values-orientation is at the same time one of the paramount traits by which the human is distinguished from the animal. In these terms, hunger satisfaction is primarily driven by natural needs, which are independent of people, rather than by values.⁶ Crucially, the latter, like culture, are worlds apart from the useful, the functional, and the practical.

From this perspective, phrases such as “culinary culture” or “culinary art” sound ill-advised. In Pietraszko’s view, the theory of culture takes as its subject the properties of an information-transmitting object that determine the cultural status of this object. In “Messages and values,” he argues that:

For a researcher of culture, objects that are messages are therefore worthy of attention only to the extent to which they actualise properties that can be the basis for interpreting such objects as correlates of culture. We look for such properties in human behaviour and creations when we study their axiosemitics.

The most important path in this search is the axiotic aspects of these objects, i.e. their relation to values.⁷

This begs a series of questions, including: What is it that can be considered an axiotic aspect of food? Does it reside in what food products we select for ingestion, or rather in how we cook, serve, and consume them? How can/should the symbolic meaning of food be deciphered? If art is a form of instantiating values, can food and eating be an art?

³ F. Fernández-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food*, New York 2002, pp. 4–5.

⁴ S. Pietraszko, *Antropologiczne podstawy teorii kultury* [undated manuscript stored at the Library of the Institute of Cultural Studies and Musicology, University of Wrocław], pp. 19–20. An abridged version of the paper was included in S. Pietraszko, *Kultura. Studia teoretyczne i metodologiczne*, Wrocław 2012, pp. 366–381.

⁵ S. Pietraszko, *Antropologiczne podstawy teorii kultury*, p. 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ S. Pietraszko, “Messages and values,” transl. T. Anessi, *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 26, 2022, no. 4, p. 112.

The art of food

Pietraszko had no doubt that food and art formed two strictly disjoined spheres. He proposed quite a narrow definition of values in order to preclude situations in which

it is admissible to recognize almost anything that seems worth anything to anybody for any reason whatsoever as “valuable” or as a value. In this way, things that are altogether incommensurable are equated with each other, such as a wholesome dish and an artwork, or an ethical principle and an effective freezer, in line with the idea that the world is one.⁸

If we think, for example, of a bowl of chicken broth and put it side by side with a painting, for instance, Édouard Manet’s *The Luncheon on the Grass*, the difficulty of comparing the two objects may well seem insurmountable. What is unclear, however, is whether this difficulty stems from their actual ontological difference or from our culturally powered habits. At the turn of the 20th century, a robust debate arose, mainly in the U.S., around the position of taste in philosophy. One of the pivotal contributions to this debate has since been made by Carolyn Korsmeyer, whose works systematically detail the sources of philosophers’ general reluctance to address matters of the body, including dietary practices.⁹

Immanuel Kant labelled taste and smell as the senses “of savour,” because by these senses “we *partake* of [objects] (take them into ourselves).”¹⁰ This classification was a major obstacle in granting food and eating the status of art, since the distinctiveness and limits of the so-called fine arts were established by the 18th-century notion of distance and disinterestedness being the defining properties of beauty and art. Korsmeyer recounts that “[i]n virtually all analyses of the senses in Western philosophy the distance between object and perceiver has been seen as a cognitive, moral, and aesthetic advantage.”¹¹ This idea underpinned the low rating of the contact senses as failing to meet the criterion of distance and proved particularly damning to the sense of taste as the most intimate and private of the senses. It appears that the major problem here lies in the utility of food and its embedment in the natural world. Korsmeyer herself on the one hand claims that the belittling exclusion of food from Western philosophical inquiries is downright improper and convincingly argues that reducing eating to an uncomplicated activity that evokes subjective sensations does not do justice to eating and food, as they are richly laden with symbolic and identity-related meaning, trigger emotions, and

⁸ S. Pietraszko, *Antropologiczne podstawy teorii kultury*, pp. 19–20.

⁹ See C. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*, Ithaca, NY–London 2002; C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, New York–London.

¹⁰ I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, transl. M.J. Gregor, The Hague 1974, pp. 37, 36.

¹¹ C. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, p. 12.

underlie moral judgments.¹² On the other hand, however, Korsmeyer endorses some old divisions and voices her objections to expanding the limits of art so as to make room for the preparation and sharing of food. She explains: “I have argued for the inclusion of taste within the domain of the aesthetic but have not argued that food and drink should be considered art forms, especially if art is conceived along the lines of fine arts.”¹³

Ultimately, Korsmeyer’s standpoint does not contradict Pietraszko’s position, because in examining the relations of food and art, she refuses to include dietary practices in the realm of fine arts. Her reasoning is based on the concept of art that appears akin to Pietraszko’s considerations on culture, as she defines art through the lens of disinterestedness and distance. For its part, taste is the most intimate of the senses, and no meal—no matter how aesthetically refined and conceptually sophisticated—ever shakes off obligations toward the body.

The tradition of fine arts was Korsmeyer’s point of reference in championing these ideas. However, contemporary art has already challenged the traditional principles, and the sense of taste has been incorporated into performative practices. In this context, food and eating are no longer merely part of routine, and their nutritive functions and their role in satisfying natural needs are relegated to the background. Based on Pietraszko’s insights, the fact that food and eating have entered the space of art has made them eligible for investigation in terms of production (*twórczość*) and creativity (*kreatywność*). Notably, Pietraszko understood production as “any fabrication, even if repeated and based on the same template,”¹⁴ binding it to the order of civilization, and he thought of creativity as being autotelic and bringing people in touch with the transcendent.¹⁵

By now, practices of multiple artists have made the sense of taste acknowledged in aesthetics and propelled the recognition of food and eating as works of art. Further in this paper, we analyze pursuits and projects associated with critical

¹² C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics*, pp. 95–98.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁴ S. Pietraszko, *Antropologiczne podstawy teorii kultury*, p. 2.

¹⁵ The encounter of these two orders is exquisitely exemplified in *Babette’s Feast*. Analyzing this movie from the perspective of aesthetic experience, Wiesław Juszczak concludes: “*Babette’s Feast* shows that, regardless of any ‘competencies’ or the will, a work can captivate those who are pulled within its orbit, even against their express wishes and decisions. And that, irrespective of one’s experience, knowledge, or even consciousness, it helps and makes one perceive what it may (seemingly) not gesture at, not even indirectly—namely, ‘total reality’ and ‘the meaning of the whole’” (W. Juszczak, “Dzieło a ‘granica sensu,’” *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 1992, nos. 3–4, p. 75). In Juszczak’s view, the meal prepared by Babette was a work of art, because it was capable of unifying the dispersed bits of experience and reveal a meaningful order. While Babette’s dinner exemplifies an extraordinary occurrence in the order of everydayness, creativity can also be discerned in common daily cooking, as argued, for example, by Luce Giard. See M. de Certeau, L. Giard, P. Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2. *Living and Cooking*, transl. T.J. Tomasik, Minneapolis 1998, p. 201.

food design that encourage thinking of food and eating in terms other than functionality, even though design tends to be regarded as primarily aimed at delivering solutions. In most cases, this process is believed to rely on the method of linear steps, where innovative outcomes are prioritized and the functionality of objects is highlighted. Vigorously developing today, the critical design movement, which also encompasses food and eating, interrogates and undermines such a notion of design and at the same time brings the tension between production and creativity into relief. As such, critical design deserves a closer scrutiny because the products it brings forth unambiguously cast doubt on preconceptions about the functions that commodities and services are supposed to fulfill in daily life.

Critical food design

Critical design promotes looking beyond the dominant utilitarian function of objects by provoking reflection on a range of currently salient issues, such as social inequality, climate change, the depletion of natural resources, and steadily increasing consumption. The scrutiny and study of critical food designers' proposals and ventures prompt the realization that they are committed to designing not only useful products, but also values. Any comprehensive examination of this issue is premised on grasping the nature of design and its agentive potential. A closer depiction of critical design as such is indispensable to support the notion that critical food design challenges the understanding of food in terms of mere functionality.

The food design domain is so capacious and diversified that it makes sense to investigate it as divided into more specialized subdisciplines. A lucid inventory of those has been offered by Francesca Zampollo, who lists food product design (focused on designing foodstuffs themselves), design for food (encompassing devices for preparing, cooking, serving, storing, and transporting food), and design with food (the development of products which are not supposed to be mass-produced, but push the limits of culinary art). Zampollo also urges the study of food space design (devoted to gastronomic settings for the cooking and consumption of food) and eating design (comprehensive arrangement of eating situations, including the context of sharing meals, the atmosphere of the venue, and human interactions).¹⁶ However, regardless of whether designers focus on the kitchen paraphernalia, on the multisensorial appreciation of the meal, on the stylization of food and food-related devices, or on the development of a creative concept inclu-

¹⁶ F. Zampollo, "What is Food Design? The complete overview of all food design sub-disciplines and how they merge," Academia.edu, 23 November 2016, https://www.academia.edu/30048438/What_is_Food_Design_The_complete_overview_of_all_Food_Design_sub_disciplines_and_how_they_merge (accessed: 10 July 2022).

sive of all these components, food design is without a doubt closely interwoven with aesthetic experience.

Of major interest to us in this paper is how critical food design, a subdiscipline that, ideally, “makes us think about food and eating issues, that raises awareness, exposes assumptions, [and] provokes action, [...] sparks debate on food related issues, problems and future possible scenarios.”¹⁷ Our main focus is thus on how production-oriented actions and critical design attitudes can be combined and, relatedly, on what gaps and perspectives are identifiable today in efforts for creating a better future and what values can be designed.

Critical food design appears to be essentially preoccupied with attempts to avoid conventional production, where utility is the prevalent function. The idea of design as dedicated to the usefulness of objects has been common currency since the Baroque. The function of objects and what we use them for are presumed to be their content. For its part, the form of objects is supposed to be as serviceable to their content as possible. Given this, in contrast to the classic, affirmative design with its basic aim of providing solutions, critical design rejects the production of objects geared to bringing financial gain and improving their utility. Consequently, if affirmative design is a form of problem-solving (based on its functionality), critical design seeks out the problems and critically assesses the context in which designs exist. In this way, critical design can approximate that which is traditionally regarded as art insofar as art is the vehicle for cultural critique. At the same time, this strategy lies at the core of the discursive approach (which consists in producing objects that communicate ideas—artifacts embedded in discourse) and leagues with a range of design subdisciplines, such as participatory design, socially responsible design, speculative design, and design fiction. The 1990s saw a particularly pronounced shift towards conceptual design, which facilitated the flourishing of non-commercial design varieties. Design as criticism had in fact been there even earlier in a number of iterations. Its roots can be traced back to the radical design movement of the 1970s, when designers, especially in Italy, highly critically appraised the mainstream design values and ideologies of the day.¹⁸ Design as criticism is also indebted to critical theory, which emerged from the Frankfurt School’s Marxist critique in the 1930s. Heavily reliant on a dialectical negation of capitalism, this cultural critique mostly targeted the commodification of art, design, and culture, framing it as a valid problem.

The very term “critical design” was coined by Anthony Dunne to depict the form of practice that he and Fiona Raby developed in collaboration with a group of design researchers at London’s Royal College of Art (RCA) in the early 1990s.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ In this way, critical design ties in with an array of critical traditions in art, such as Dada, Futurism, and Fluxus. Its oppositional leanings also draw on the work of the Interrogative Design Group founded by Krzysztof Wodiczko.

In their definition, critical design is a type of design that “uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the role products play in everyday life.”¹⁹ In critical design, the designing principles, tactics, and methods are not mobilized to simply consolidate the status quo understood as a service-based relationship between user and product. Instead, creative processes are expected to afford designers opportunities for socially-sensitive and socially-engaged actions. To this purpose, as Matt Malpass explains, one “uses strategies that challenge the limits of design. These designs act as a form of critique and argument that is established through the design of objects and through the communication of the object’s narrative of use.”²⁰ Consequently, critical design is a creative strategy that turns design into a medium for making visible that which usually remains hidden or implicit in our everyday foodways. The attention that designers devote to food bespeaks not so much their urge to produce and experiment with various foodstuffs as rather their increasing awareness of food issues. The development of food design as a medium and of new means of expression within it helps perceive tensions between production and creativity, foster speculative and critical capacities, and thus shape people’s habits and affect their modes of thought and action. Given this, the label of critical food design can be attributed to any project that maps not only utopian, but also polemical and critically-inflected visions of the future of food.²¹

Such pursuits have been invited and supported, for example, by Design Indaba, an organization that launched the Protofarm 2050 project, under which five designer teams were asked to come up with visions of future agriculture beyond the horizon of possibilities and anticipations available in the public domain.²² The initiators of the project describe the outcome of the designers’ efforts as “a unique vision of the year 2050 with increased urbanisation and population, limited natural resources, climate challenges and digital-biological integration.”²³ The designers have sought to communicate that the ways in which we obtain and eat our food are not only determined by our biology but also shaped by our culture and civilization. In their work, the focus on inescapable external challenges of today’s world

¹⁹ The term “critical design” was first used by A. Dunne in his *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience, and Critical Design* (Cambridge, MA 1999) and then honed in *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects* co-authored with F. Raby (Basel, 2001). See A. Dunne, F. Raby, “Critical Design FAQ,” Dunne & Raby, <http://dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0> (accessed: 15 July 2022).

²⁰ M. Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practice*, New York 2017, p. 43.

²¹ See C. DiSalvo, “Spectacles and tropes: Speculative design and contemporary food cultures,” *The Fibreculture Journal* 2012, no. 20, p. 111.

²² The designer teams invited to develop a unique vision of the year 2050 included Futurefarmers, 5.5 designers, Dunne & Raby, Revital Cohen, and Frank Tjepkema.

²³ “Protofarm 2050,” [exhibition description], Design Indaba, <https://www.designindaba.com/projects/protolfarm-2050> (accessed: 10 September 2022).

was accompanied by the need to respond to the issues at hand.²⁴ By reconsidering the notion of agriculture as the basic, utilitarian source of global food supply, they highlighted the depletion of natural resources and also foregrounded opportunity for renewable production systems. Affiliated with critical food design, the designs developed as part of Protofarm 2050 should not be viewed solely in functional terms as offering future promises or ready-made solutions to real food-related issues. Rather, these works strategically illuminated the problems they addressed, creating conditions and contexts for an informed interpretation of those, thereby drawing up some remedial scenarios. The Protofarm 2050 designs envisaged inner-city farming areas that shortened the distance food must travel to reach our tables, vertical farming, and feeding the livestock on grass to reduce methane emissions. This shows that the creative critical approach can indeed tie in with the development of non-standard scenarios based on organic procedures, communal methods, and/or self-sufficient ecosystems. Speculative critical design visions spark a series of questions, such as: What does this object do? What is it needed for? What is it based on? What does it refer to? What does it say about ourselves? By encouraging such inquiries, designers attempt to influence the audiences and users and, at the same time, spotlight the practical aspects that make it possible to transform our prior actions into acts that instantiate values. In order to bring into relief the relationship between production and creativity, we need a more comprehensive look at other initiatives and projects within critical food design.

The dual role of food and eating

The works of critical designers not infrequently revolve around food both as an economic resource bound up with production and distribution and as an intimate resource, viscerally close to human beings. Such practices are exemplified by two undertakings launched under the label of, respectively, the Conflict Kitchen and the *VALUE – food – DIVERSITY* project. In both of them, the design work is the vehicle for production-focused and creative solutions.

The Conflict Kitchen is a restaurant designed to serve cuisines of the countries with which the U.S. is in conflict. The founders of the enterprise explain that they use cuisine and innovative storytelling to involve the public in discussions on the cultures and peoples of whom we often know only very little, if anything at all. As the focus rotates from region to region, the guests are introduced to foods and cultures of different peoples, who “offer their perspectives on Indigenous sovereignty, economic and environmental conflict, and cultural erasure. [...] These di-

²⁴ In the *Guide to Free Farming* by 5.5 designers, the city was transfigured into a hunting and gathering environment. The contemporary representations and cultural practices of food sourcing were expanded by adding community-based hunting-like activities in which residents could engage together.

verse perspectives reflect a nuanced range of thought and serves [sic] to instigate questioning, conversation, and debate with our customers and the public at large.”²⁵ Formally arranged as a restaurant-based intervention, the project changes in response to the current geopolitical events. Every iteration comes with workshops, discussions, and publications which are supposed to enhance the public’s engagement. Another feature of the Conflict Kitchen project is that it occasionally changes locations. For example, a dinner in the series devoted to the conflict with Cuba was hosted by a Cuban-American resident at her home. The five-course meal was preceded by the screening of family videos and accompanied by recollections and family stories. The dishes served to the guests included roasted pork marinated in mojo sauce, an okra and tomato stew, plantain dumplings, and sweet corn pudding with cinnamon. What calls for attention in this case is whether the food (as an object) transmitted information alone on that occasion or whether it also conveyed values. What could be considered an axiomatic aspect of food then? On the one hand, the restaurant script was about service-provision for the guests (feeding them), but on the other it appears to have chimed in with a new vision of humanity informed by cultural symbols and historical meanings. The experience of the meal could easily involve much more than the flavors of the food, for example, by centering on the history of the symbolically loaded dishes, on sharing the meal with people from another cultural background, and/or on the reflective awareness of political conflicts. In this project, practical activities involved in the preparation of meals were correlated with the creative idea of overcoming stereotypes and finding the truth about the history and customs of the indigenous population. This manner of using critical design as an epistemic tool helped explore and redefine locally and globally unfolding phenomena. In this way, critical design, as a medium, proves capable of posing questions out of concern for society, nurturing self-awareness, and channeling our understanding, interrogation, and critique of both consumer society and the food culture around us.

A similar idea powered the design vision of the Austrian designers Sonja Stummerer and Martin Hablesreiter, who sought to propose a perspective for integrating the practical role of nourishment with the values that food may instantiate. Their *VALUE – food – DIVERSITY* was a performative interdisciplinary project for raising awareness about the political and ethical dimensions of food and eating. Regarding the three eponymous themes of sustainable development, Stummerer and Hablesreiter critically assessed our common eating habits and their impact on the economic significance of food. A website devoted to their work explains that “[t]hey try to make it clear to the guests that our western civilised culture is so full of traditions, rules, customs, belief, etc. that we are not always able to or willing to practise a sustainable lifestyle,” and goes on to cite their self-description:

²⁵ “About,” Conflict Kitchen, <http://www.conflictkitchen.org/about/> (accessed: 25 September 2022).

“We want a discussion on the value of food, on biodiversity, on the diversity of cultivated plants, and on the future of society and nutrition.”²⁶ To this end, they arranged an encounter involving a shared meal and a discussion at a fruit and vegetable garden in Vienna. The *mise-en-scène* consisted of two rows of chairs facing each other and, in this way, drawing attention to the fact that there was no table between them. Instead of the missing table, jars with pickled vegetables, cutlery, and tissues were put on the grass as part of the meal. As Stummerer was stitching together slices of bread to reconstruct the whole loaf, Hablesreiter welcomed the guests and led them one by one to their appointed seats at the purported common “table.” Then, he went on to host the meeting by asking the participants about the values they upheld in connection with food and other consumption practices. He was particularly determined to talk about the potential of sustainable development. One of his key questions was how the guests imagined the future of nourishment. The focus on this issue made it clear how much alertness, mindfulness, and effort to update one’s knowledge of food-related problems it required. The guests were led to realize that they were not really aware of a range of urgent issues, such as hunger, malnutrition, food overproduction, and the constantly aggravating economic disparities. In the discussion, the participants concluded that the causes of these phenomena were first and foremost culturally determined. This resulted in reconsiderations of their immediate ramifications and consequently helped develop adequate possible scenarios for finding emergency solutions.

The sharing of ideas and insights was regularly interrupted by Stummerer, who fed each participant, putting the pickles straight into their mouths. In this way, the designer duo systematically provoked the audience through questions and activities, treating food as a full-fledged actor that changed the narratives and the dynamics of the discussion. In the performative action they designed, the food they supplied was a palpable object in the debate and invited in-depth analyses. The consumers’ engaged imagination and intellect could thus morph into a self-knowledge of dietary habits and determinants. Although we tend to perceive the global food system in terms of interactions between the distribution and the representation of food, we must not forget that these processes ultimately affect every consumer of food as an individual. In Stummerer and Hablesreiter’s project, food was both the main theme and the graspable message that represented certain attitudes and cultural values. The participants in the event obtained an opportunity to look at victuals not only as entangled in the models of production, transport, and ingestion as such, but also as part of a unique food environment replete with implicit meanings that accompany eating. The discussion could address the aim of consumption (is it supposed to satisfy one’s hunger quickly or to cater to higher-order needs, such as sustainable develop-

²⁶ M. Hablesreiter, S. Stummerer, “VALUE – food – DIVERSITY” [performance description], Honey & Bunny, <https://www.honeyandbunny.com/projects/48/value-food-diversity> (accessed: 11 September 2022).

ment or support for local producers?), the links between food and tradition or region (is this relation strong or scarce?), and/or the image of the product (is it calorie-rich but nutritionally deficient, or is it varied and highly nourishing?). Stummerer and Hablesreiter indicated that through the choice of the kind, quality, and quantity of calories we ingest, we determine the role of food as an object that is simultaneously part of the world around us and part of the world representing ourselves. It can function as the daily and the useful, as well as the cultural. The designers' enjoining actions were supported by Andrea Heisting, Ines Omann, and Wolfgang Pauser, experts in biodiversity, ecological economy, and the history of culture, who blended with the guests and elicited critical public statements.²⁷ The collaborative action of researchers, artists, activists, and consuming guests generated previously unconsidered conclusions. The project resonated with the notion that what we eat is more than just the sum of nutrients for our bodies—that it is also a message on values and an enactment of them.

Conclusion

Starting from the division of the human world into the orders of civilization and culture and without undermining the epistemic value of this distinction, we have sought to show that multiple agentic factors are interwoven in food-related practices so that the split into natural necessities, civilizational utility, and cultural values tends to be barely tenable. The fundamental biological needs are not always axiologically neutral, and the ways in which they are met sometimes slip out of the order of necessity. In cooking and in eating alike, the line between production and creativity is sometimes blurred, if not obliterated, because food is not only a precondition of survival, but also a representation of society with its relations and an expression of values. When food designers engage in a critique of the senses, they reveal human limitations and insufficient attentiveness both toward the gustatory sensations one experiences and to the feeling of hunger or satiation. The examples of food designs marshaled in our argument have shown that they not only provide critical insights into the utilitarian dimension of food and eating, but also are a locus of aesthetic experiences and ethical reflection. Stepping beyond the pragmatics of nutrition, they unveil the intersections of utility and culture understood as a space of relative autonomy. Creating conditions conducive to the projection of representations and values, they become unique mirrors for consumers, enabling them to question cultural values and attitudes.

Translated by Patrycja Poniatowska

²⁷ Ibid.

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