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# CULINARY LESSONS

THE SPACE OF FOOD

STÄDELSCHULE ARCHITECTURE CLASS

CHARLOTTE BIRNBAUM  
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KIVI SOTAMAA  
CAROLYN STEEL  
JAN ÅMAN

SAC JOURNAL



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# CULINARY LESSONS THE SPACE OF FOOD

Over the last few decades, the culinary has emerged with an increasingly central place in our daily lives beyond providing sustenance. It has become an expression of marketable lifestyles, prominently featured in all kinds of publications, and chefs from all over the world are celebrated public personas, appearing as guests on television shows or hosting their own. Their cutting edge culinary practices draw on lessons from the sciences, and their restaurants present guests with extreme holistic, gustatory and aesthetic experiences.

Meanwhile, global culinary trends are kept in balance by a rising interest in local and seasonal produce and traditions. Sustainability and environmental effects weigh in against non-seasonal habits and the exoticism of food from the other side of the world. The less admirable part of the food industry is being examined for its - to say the least - questionable ethical and environmental practices. While starvation spreads in some parts of the world, the same industry and the supermarket chains provide the greatest riches to a few within one of the largest global industries.

Against this background yet mainly because the culinary throughout history is intrinsically linked to architecture and the arts, *Culinary Lessons - The Space of Food*, the fourth issue of the SAC Journal, explores select aspects of the relationship between these three. Beyond the obvious - that the culinary has been a motif in the arts since time immemorial and that architecture always has included spaces for storing, making and consuming food - architecture and art have come to entertain an intense and sometimes far-reaching fascination with food and the culinary. This fascination unfolds from historical precursors along materialist, aesthetic and social trajectories in recognition of how powerfully food and the culinary penetrate not only our lives but the contexts that enable and deliver the most rudimentary but also the most sophisticated human experience.

*Culinary Lessons* commenced mid-October 2015 as a programme in Städelschule's Master Thesis Studio, *Architecture and Aesthetic Practice*, which is led by Johan Bettum and Daniel Birnbaum. Two years later, in early December 2017, it ended. By then, a series of public events - most of them conversations hosted with participating experts from various fields

- and a yearlong academic endeavour with a group of students had successfully been completed. Students and guests had been in extended conversations, prepared, served and enjoyed food and drink on many occasions, and participated in culinary performances. Two of these events are documented herein, one in the form of text, the other as a portfolio of pictures.

In the following *Introduction - Culinary Lessons*, the relationship between the culinary, architecture and art is further briefly elaborated and the different parts of the overall programme, which was conducted by Städelschule Architecture Class and hosted in different locations, introduced.

The relationship between the culinary, art and architecture was additionally expounded on with the help of experts in a public conversation hosted in Venice in spring 2016. The event took place within Goethe-Institut's programme, *Performing Architecture*, and on the fringe of the Venice Architecture Biennale's opening. The culinary historian Charlotte Birnbaum opened the event with a humorous presentation on sugar as material for creative work in the history of the culinary, architecture and art. She went on to account for the work of Marie-Antoine Carême, 'the genius of classic French cuisine,' past extravagant feasts, and the extreme positions on food held by the Futurist Filippo Marinetti and the Surrealist Salvador Dali. Her presentation suggested that an absolute distinction between the disciplines is not always obvious. Her presentation is included in the middle this issue in the form of an essay, *Nine Notes on Sugar, Art and the Dining Table*.

Charlotte Birnbaum's presentation was a perfect introduction to the subsequent conversation in Venice where she, the architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter, the dancer and choreographer Fabrice Mazliah, the artist Tobias Rehberger, and the curator, writer and urban activist Jan Åman met with Daniel Birnbaum and Johan Bettum to elaborate on the theme. The transcript, *Culinary Lessons - A Conversation About Food, Art and Architecture*, witnesses both the profound, historical relations between these disciplines as much as the productive provocations that food can lend architecture and art - or, in the words of Kwinter: '... food is simply going back to the beginning ... to the practice ... to re-pattern our science, our art, our design - as a practice.'

The introductory part of *Culinary Lessons - The Space of Food* ends with a picture portfolio that presents digital and analogue excerpts from students' experiments with ingredients within the design studio, *The Feast*, which was the yearlong, experimental odysseys they undertook in *Architecture and Aesthetic Practice*.

The students' experiments centred on experimental, material transformations of ingredients for a feast hosted in Städelschule early 2016. Meanwhile, with *Sitopia - Shaping Our World Through Food*, the architect and writer Carolyn Steel situates food at the heart of an astounding history and an overwhelming nexus of political, cultural and economical forces in relation to urban morphology and urban life. Steel's contribution comes out of her acclaimed book, *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives*, and her essay herein helps to place this issue's thematic concerns within the very large political and economical framework that pertains to the future of architecture and cities.

Daniel Birnbaum's *My Eye is a Mouth - On Dieter Roth's Oral Aesthetic* attends to another history, one situated in the arts and Städelschule. Birnbaum discusses the radical art of Dieter Roth as it was presented in 1987 in the inaugural exhibition of Städelschule's gallery, Portikus. Roth used food, language and literature to break with traditional aesthetics with its prioritisation of the visual. Birnbaum's short history provides evidence for the power that food has lent art in recent times and in its continued effort to afford us alternative ways of perceiving the self and reality.

Discussing the artist Mike Bouchet's contribution to *Manifesta 11* in 2016, Johan Bettum is everything but brief. He uses Bouchet's sculpture, *The Zürich Load*, to explore the possibility of a political space in relationship to individual and collective identities. Bouchet's sculpture was made using the daily ordure produced by Zürich's inhabitants, and Bettum attempts to connect this culinary aftermath in art form to a space that sits between those that Steel and Birnbaum respectively address. In the process, he links minute culinary and corporeal sensations to the implied but nonetheless real and vast spatial expanse of food.

Städelschule Architecture Class' programme, *Culinary Lessons*, revisited Venice in autumn 2016, once more courtesy of the Goethe-Institut and with the help of Kulturfonds Frankfurt Rhein Main and the City of Frankfurt, Department of Culture. For the occasion Fabrice Mazliah and Johan Bettum teamed up to conceive *Conviviumepulum*, a culinary performance that hosted more than fifty guests for a Venetian evening meal. The dishes were prepared by pairs guests, and the evening unfolded to the choreography and performance of Mazliah and his colleague, Douglas Bateman. The event is photo-documented with a portfolio herein.

Turning away from the material and gustatory delights of food, the architect David Ruy addresses the way that it is represented through images in his contribution, *The Animal That Eats Pictures*. Ruy's interest goes beyond the fashionable imaging of the culinary to situate our ability to imagine and represent things as a unique human capacity traceable from our pre-historic to future survival as a species. Our representation of food, he argues, is at the heart of the culinary and a prime example of humans' unique capacity to imagine, make and use images to represent reality.

After Charlotte Birnbaum's essay, which follows Ruy's, the architect Kivi Sotamaa describes Ateljé Sotamaa's restaurant, Finnjävel in Helsinki, as a 'theatre of gastronomy.' He likens the project to a "Gesamtkunstwerk" where food, architecture and product design were staged in unison. The seductive space that Sotamaa documents, attests to architects' not-uncommon ambition to link culinary and spatial experience. Yet, Sotamaa's "theatre" is at once a rousing counterpoint and accompaniment to Ruy's space of representation.

The last part of this issue presents the projects that earned a prize or honourable mention in SAC's AIV Master Thesis Prize 2015 and 2016. In 2015 Chakkarat Wongthirawat, Sandra Ebu-zoeme, and Nathaphon Phantounarakul earned honourable mentions; in 2016 Jorge Luis Cordero Ruiz, Wonsoek Chae, and Kaushambi Mate shared the prize. Chae and Mate's respective projects were carried out within *The Feast*, the programme of *Architecture and Aesthetic Practice*.





JOHAN BETTUM

# INTRODUCTION CULINARY LESSONS

Exploring the world of food and the culinary in relation to architecture and the arts is concomitant to taking on the indisputable: food, drink and culinary culture are intimately linked to and embedded in the histories of architecture and the arts. Daily rituals for shelter and sustenance as much as festive occasions celebrating secular traditions, religious figures and events, or political power are inscribed and manifest in buildings, cities, pictures, decorative objects and sculpture since time immemorial. When Gottfried Semper (1803-1879), the German architect and theorist, in 1851 attempted to explain the origins of architecture, one of his four elements was the hearth, the first sign of human settlement.<sup>1</sup> Over the flames food was prepared and around it social life unfolded. Pre-historic art depicts scenes of hunting, and since the Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque periods, food, culinary practice and consumption are commonplace motifs in art. Obvious examples are Giuseppe Arcimboldo's (1526 or 1527–1593) use of fruits, vegetables and other edible items to make human portraits, Michelangelo Caravaggio's still life, *Basket of Fruit* (1596), or the still-life paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, exemplified by the work of Frans Hals (1582–1666).

The trajectories of this history continue till our age while with the dawn of Modernity it also becomes radically trans-

formed and expanded far beyond the once dominant mode of representation, painting. Latter-day architecture and art engaging with the culinary have not shied away from employing food and decaying consumables as the materiality for the work itself, and - not the least - food and the culinary have been used to expand the social and political footing and reach - particularly in the arts - through performances and direct engagement with the audience.

However, if tenaciously querying and probing the obvious, untold horizons may arise, beyond which new indefinite opportunities may lie. This was the motivation behind the programme, *Culinary Lessons*, which commenced in Städelschule's Master Thesis Studio, *Architecture and Aesthetic Practice*, in autumn 2015. *Architecture and Aesthetic Practice* explores architecture in relation to the arts to infuse architectural design with original and critical ideas and practices. At this juncture when architecture has lost much of its critical edge due to its allegiance with technological positivism and capitalist incentives, the studio relates selectively to the arts in order to critically engage with and revitalise conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects of architectural design. The studio aspires to radicalise the flow of information, concepts and procedures that constitute architectural design to engender



**CULINARY LESSONS - The Space of Food** is based on a series of events, *Culinary Lessons*, which were hosted by the Städelschule Architecture Class and which engaged with the relation between food, art and architecture. The series addressed the enormous social, economic and cultural spaces that accompany the production and consumption of food, and attempted to unravel some of these spaces' structure and dynamics. The central ambition was to learn from culinary history and, not the least, the recent vanguard of culinary practice.

No human activity is so encompassing and engenders such effects on our societies and lives as the culinary. Culinary practices lay out aesthetic as much as ethical trajectories that span from century-old traditions to lifesaving experiments for the present and future. They provide for human sustenance and the highest form of bodily enjoyment while transversing the spaces that they at once produce and profoundly affect.

This fourth issue of the SAC JOURNAL presents the central conversation in *Culinary Lessons*, which took place in Venice, together with a series of texts and projects that chart and speculate on the relationship between architecture, art and the culinary world. Contributors to this issue include, amongst others, Charlotte Birnbaum, Daniel Birnbaum, Mike Bouchet, Sanford Kwinter, Fabrice Mazliah, Tobias Rehberger, David Ruy, Kivi Sotamaa, Carolyn Steel, Jan Åman and Johan Bettum. It also features the winning projects of the AIV Master Thesis Prize in 2015 and 2016.

**SAC JOURNAL** is a publication series that addresses topical issues within architecture. The journal documents, critically reviews and presents theoretical discussions concerning contemporary design and research. The content of SAC JOURNAL is produced by invited contributors and students and faculty at the Städelschule Architecture Class.

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