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An Evaluation on the Relation between Gastronomy and Art: The Case of Ferran Adria

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Abstract

Presenting or eating are not only being physiological needs but also psychological needs related with taste and pleasure. Today a discipline called gastronomy studies above-mentioned needs in the light of different interdisciplinary areas such as art. Highlighted aesthetical concerns and creative styles while serving the food has grown in recent years and this trend indicates that gastronomy has a close relation with art. The aim of this study is to question the descriptive aspects of the gastronomy as an art or not. First, the terms of “aesthetic”, “beautiful” and “creativity” are reviewed. The case of Ferran Adria’s works was evaluated how avant-garde postmodern art movements effected. It was concluded that gastronomy can be accepted as an art and new cookery applications can be defined as contemporary art. As a matter of fact, Adrian’s works reveals that he is not only the chef who changed cooking, presentation and eating habits radically but he is also an artist.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, New Cookery, Aesthetic, Creativity, Ferran Adria;

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1. Introduction

Art in fine arts education has a "high/elitist" structure, while the education model has a "mimetic" basis. Therefore, the focus is frequently on the sense of "ideal" aesthetics wrapped in cotton as founded by the Western World. In this sense of aesthetics, which was developed in line with Kant's concept of disinterested pleasure and established based on Plato's world of ideas, the senses of taste, smell and touch are not thought to give aesthetic pleasure. Then, why is the eating experience, which simultaneously addresses the five senses, not regarded as art, while Marcel Duchamp's ordinary ready-made objects, Rene Magritte's paintings and Rirkrit Tiravanija's performances in food servicing are discussed within the scope of high art?

However, it is seen that a number of schools giving education in the field of gastronomy provide service under the name of culinary arts. Then, what is the intersection level of art and gastronomy? In this respect, the purpose of the present study was to reveal the common aspects of applications in the fields of art and gastronomy. In line with this purpose, the literature on gastronomy, aesthetics, creativity and art was reviewed, and the studies conducted by Ferran Adria were examined as a case study. The findings demonstrated that foods presented by recent chiefs like Adria aim to break the settled perceptions of the art audiences. In this way, creative chiefs who provide their audiences with unforgettable aesthetic experiences remind us of the need for removal of the obstacles which move leftovers from art laws. The relation between art and gastronomy especially focusing on new cookery is discussed.

2. Aesthetics and Art

Aesthetics, one of milestones of art, can be defined as a science which examines the principles provided by sensible perceptions or as a discipline which investigates all the beautiful emotions giving pleasure. The science of aesthetics is examined under two categories: idealist and pragmatist.

The idealist aesthetic is a theory which started with Plato in Antique Age reaching its peak with Hegel, which gained a different dimension Kant's work of Critique of Judgment and which is represented by Croce. According to this approach, art is thought to be separate from all other human activities. Expecting practical benefits from art is associated with an attitude which does not involve art.

Depending on current written sources, it could be stated that the first theory related to art was developed by Plato, who provided a philosophical response to the question of "What is beauty?" According to Plato, a product an artist/craftsman is the copy of images reflected to the world. This type of understanding, which continued with Aristotle, maintained its influence until age of enlightenment. Until that period, what was expected from an artist was not an ability but creativity.

Aesthetics gained its independence as a field of science with Kant in the age of enlightenment. Kant guided the new aesthetic world with his analyses of beauty and pointed to the autonomy of art and of the artist and emphasized the importance of creativity rather than of ability in the process of creation. In the process changing with Hegel, aesthetics is regarded not just as the science of beauty but also as the philosophy of fine arts. Starting from the 19th century, the perception of "beauty" became independent, and concepts like creativity, intuition and experience began to exist in the field of art.

The understanding of pragmatic aesthetics, which developed in the same period, demonstrates an inclusive attitude without considering art to be opposite to science. In this theory, which was led by James, systematized by Dewey and conveyed to the present time by Shusterman, art is explained with the phrase of "aesthetic experience". James associates aesthetics with somatic experiences. According to the experiences classified by James as primary and secondary pleasures, primary pleasures are mental processes, while secondary pleasures are somatic reactions which occur as a result of mental processes (Shusterman, 2011). According to Dewey, who followed James, aesthetic is not just a reactional experience but an interactive experience as well (Kuhlen, 2005). Shusterman, an

important representative of pragmatist aesthetics, claims that it is not possible to provide a definition covering all current art works. Shusterman holds the belief that taking art as "aesthetic experience" will help art demonstrate an integrative character covering the work and the artist and will develop the art itself by merging with the real world (Shusterman, 2000).

Consequently, while idealism allows making clear discrimination between what is art and what is not art, pragmatism has a comprehensive structure and accepts all the differences in art. The pragmatist understanding, which is constructed upon the idealist aesthetics, points out that the world perceived with the help of senses has great influence on the body. The "body", which is not thought to exist in idealist aesthetics, gains importance with pragmatist aesthetics and appears as a basic material in postmodern art after 1960. In addition, daily aesthetic experiences start to spread into field of modern art. However, before this, the concept of new/modern art defined today as "fine arts" appears.

With the start of the 19th century, art work creates sophisticated pleasures, while craft and popular arts transform into an underestimated field whose performance is associated with ability and whose purpose is to present the value of usage/consumption or to entertain (Shinner, 2001). Art, which is idealized with an elitist structure, moves away from the public over time. Avantgarde artists, who set off to react to this situation, take action to create different aesthetic ideas. For the first time, the period in question starts a conscious process of questioning the concept of creativity and aesthetics. The fact that art gradually becomes individualized and subjective in time starts the postmodern movement, which developed in 1960s. This postmodern movement means moving away from the known reality about art. The soil, water and nature transform into the main material of art with the help of land art, and the body turns into the main material of performance art. Besides this, some artists include foods and the action of eating into art effectively.

3. A Gastronomy Artist: Ferran Adria

The term "gastronomy" which is rooted in French is held to be first used by Joseph Berchoux (1801) and quickly became popularized in literary and critical circles to mean "the art and science of delicate eating" (Mennell, 1996). Chef Auguste Escoffier who is best known for fundamental shifts he brought to service and kitchen organization states: "*Cooking is a science and an art, and the man who puts all his heart into satisfying his fellow men deserves consideration*" (Dandavati, 2011). In addition, this statement, many definitions that emphasize the art dimension of cooking, as much as it's scientific dimension, support the idea that cooking can be a form of high art. Thus, in specific examples of old and contemporary culinary arts many practices presenting aesthetic experiences to individuals can be observed. One primary example that comes to mind is the idea of integrating food into art by Italian Futurists.

At the beginning of the 20th century Marinetti and his fellows began with the predisposition of rejecting all existing aesthetical values and initiated a movement to communicate social and political messages, called Futurist Diners started in Trieste. The futurists who embarked on a path to restructure the social mores of Italians; aims to present an intense experience based on the power of imagination where sweet and sour tastes coexist, like bananas and anchovies (Formis, 2014). Although futurist food suggestions of Marinetti and colleagues did not garner widespread interest at the time, the said movement supported introduction of preservatives, and implements for performing shredding, crushing and emulsification processes into our contemporary cuisines. By the present day, obstacles separating food from the rules of art has long been surmounted by the prominent haute cuisine chef Ferran Adria.

The story of what has made Ferran Adria, the famous chef Ferran Adria begins in the 3 Michelin star restaurant ElBullie where he has tried new ways to understand and practice haute cuisine to make people happy (Planellas & Svejnova, 2007). One of the most important events shaping Adria's career takes place in a workshop by French chef Jacques Maximin. "Creativity means not copying" voiced by

Maximin will enable Adria to break free of chains and discover freedom (http://www.kitchen-theory.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/1961-2006_elbulli.pdf).

In 1992, Adria spent whole winter in the workshop of sculptor (friend and customer) Xavier Medina Campeny. There Adria created dishes while Xavier Medina Campeny made sculptures. The duo who ate the meals prepared by Adria, constantly conversed about art during that time. Undoubtedly, this has exposed Adria to creative intelligence and the art world to which he was a stranger, providing him with inspiration for innovation in gastronomy. The very seeds of first creative ElBulli workshop was planted in this workshop (Planellas & Svejnova, 2007).

This workshop initially established by Adria and his team in catering firms outside of Barcelona, moved into the city permanently in 2000. The workshop which has been dubbed the pure house of creativity, develops many creative applications to be served at ElBulli. For example, in 2006 of the over 5000 trials conducted in the workshop 125 were included in the following year's menu (Planellas & Svejnova, 2007). Eventually Adria decided that for gastronomy to develop there would have to be exchange and cooperation between wide ranges of fields of expertise like; art, history, industrial design, gastronomic culture, engineering etc (Nihoul, 2009). The chef who acted on a strong conviction shut down the ElBulli in 2011 and in 2014 opened it again under the name of elBulliofoundation. This non-profit foundation established to promote creativity is Adria's greatest legacy to the worlds of science and art (Nihoul, 2009).

The notable success of Adria in his profession, passion about innovation and his profession has brought him fame not only in Spain, but also has made him into one of the best known international brands of Spain. In 2001 he was covered by The New York Times magazine with headline "The Nueva Nouvelle Cuisine". He took the cover of the magazine in 2004 as one of the most influential 100 persons. Adria also appeared on the cover of Le Monde under the title "Is Ferran Adria, the alchemist, the world's greatest chef?" (Planellas & Svejnova 2007).

Adria, whose fame extends beyond the haute cuisine community, was, over time included in art exhibitions and started to known by artist and designers. The chef took a part in an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris. In 2006, won the Lucky Strike Designer Award (Planellas & Svejnova, 2007). In addition to all these achievements, he was invited to Documenta 12, the most innovative art event, held in Kessel, Germany. During the 100 days of exhibition, Adria's art work was a dinner for two people at ElBulli and tickets to Spain (Pitman, 2013).

Adria's inclusion in the Documenta, quickly led to recognition of his genius and his art. But, there are some who hold that his superior talents don't necessarily mean that his works are an art. Roger Boergel, who invited him to the Documenta, has stated; "I invited Ferran Adria because he was able to create his own aesthetic which has garnered wide acclaim internationally. What concerns me is not whether people see him as art or not. Artistic intelligence doesn't manifest itself in only in limited contexts. Additionally, art can't be defined solely as photography, sculpting, painting or cooking. Only under certain conditions do each of these activities become art" (http://www.Documenta12.de/fileadmin/pdf/PM/Adria_%20en.pdf).

So, what are these specific conditions put forth by Buergel, when cooking can be considered as an art? One of the prominent reasons why cooking isn't considered an art at Documenta, is the fact that Adria never had a career formed by the art system. For example, Rirkrit Tiravanija, in his performances, cooks just like an ordinary cook but he is still known as an artist. What is an extraordinary is not in features of what he cooks, but is in his presentation of himself as an artist while he is cooking (Vidokle, 2010). Adria has never presented himself as an artist. When asked if food is a form of art or not, he answered, "When the New York Times first published an article about El Bulli, they compared me to Dalí. That was really flattering... But I'm a cook, and I'm well aware of my limitations. I admire the work of artists but I don't aspire to practice their art. Whether cuisine is an art form or not doesn't interest me. What I find fascinating is the dialogue between both disciplines: my

dishes, for instance, have nothing to do with art. But, like an artist, I seek to move people through them.” (Represa, 2013).

Although he emphasizes being a chef, it can be clearly seen from his statements that Adria, behaves with an artist’s awareness. As a matter of fact, his food presentation, which breaks prejudices, encourages reconsideration, focuses on discovering texture in addition to taste and smell makes it difficult for them to be considered as anything but artistic performances that use food as a medium. When Adria’s “The Soup” is taken as an example, it becomes impossible to deny his intellect and artistic flair.

A person who observes Adria’s presentation will first see a script, “The Soup”, carved in large letters on a textured surface. The dessert titled “The Soup” reminds Rene Magritte’s painting named “Key of Dreams”, will, just like Rene Magritte’s works, entertain, astonish and will drive the observer to contemplate. Perhaps all the images and tastes of the plate, which we think is a dessert are indeed that of a soup. This name, given to his dessert reminds us, just like Magritte does, that meanings of words are far from certain and are unreliable (Lynton, 2004), and reminds us that what they put forth needs to be endorsed by artistic institutions.

4. Conclusion

Concepts of “interaction and experience” which we are familiar with from many classic examples of contemporary art, are gaining popularity in recent examples of art. Works of art which emphasize these concepts; all senses and tools exist to establish a relationship between the artist and the audience.

When works on taste in the modernist kitchen and deconstructive food are taken into consideration many striking examples can be observed. These works which exhibit food’s ability to represent things other than themselves are chosen by chefs, like Ferran Adria, to give the audience a chance to pause and contemplate. While, these works by chefs like Ferran Adria are sometimes considered as “New Cookery” or “Molecular Gastronomy”, they deserve to be considered in context of contemporary art (Raviv, 2010). Undoubtedly, any chef using gelling agents or making foam can’t be considered an artist. But, some chefs, like Ferran Adria, invite their audiences to pause and contemplate, free them from prejudices and present the familiar in a new light, just like artists. Adria, who uses food as a medium, separates eating and nourishment while blurs the boundary between life and art (Raviv, 2010). Therefore, concepts to fully define the sensations of taste and smells within the aesthetic concept are needed. Any such undertaking will help us to portray these sensations within history of art and develop a new understanding of what is art.

On the other hand, radical transformations in the food world, makes it imperative for us to consider food as a medium of art, as in the case of Ferran Adria. This implies that established views and definitions of gastronomy needs to be expanded in a manner that reflects their use as a medium of innovation and perhaps that art too needs to be redefined to reflect these features.

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