

# In Advance of a Culinary Review

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*With the hindsight of half a century,*

Greenbergian formalism may now be seen not as the prescriptive, proscriptive, restrictive paradigm it was intended to be, but rather as a threshold between aesthetic types, a descriptive mechanism that pertains only to a very limited set of aesthetic objects, linked to a brief moment in history and responding to a specific polemic. The reduction of artistic activity to the least common denominator of material specificity was perhaps the last great instance of criticism as exclusion, and if it has a posterity in contemporary art theory and aesthetics, it is an ironic one, counter to the intuition of its author: an increased attention to the manner in which the materiality of the signifier is polyvalent, unstable, synaesthetic, nomadic. For we learn from this theory not only the value of respecting the exigencies of the flatness of the canvas, but also, *a contrario*, that the ambiguities created by projecting a three-dimensional field onto two dimensions are themselves infinitely renewable and continually marvelous. To say this is to do nothing less than rethink five centuries of representational painting and revise our vision by paying attention to the fact that the window of classic perspectival representation is also a plane, and a canvas, and a screen, and a dream. At its zenith, Clement Greenberg's formalism was already being pressured by the performative tensions of Fluxus, Situationism, Lettrism, Happenings, mixed-media, multimedia, "intermedia," and sundry other artistic exploits that would complicate matters beyond any possible formalist recognition. In a sense, the history of modern art criticism is one of augmenting the visibility of painting with the complex matrix of synaesthetic possibilities, beginning with late-nineteenth-century considerations of the haptic qualities of painting, while the history of modern painting is one of literally enhancing the visible with materials that engage the other senses.



In that context, it wasn't long before artist-cum-chef Daniel Spoerri created his first *tableau piège* in 1961, treating the flatness of the dinner table like a canvas (and not vice versa): the procedure was to glue on the remains of the meal, plates and all, and tilt the totality ninety degrees to hang it on the wall like a painting. This moment marked not only a turning point in the plastic arts—not unlike the one half a century earlier when Picasso violated the plastic integrity of his Cubist paintings by pasting on commercial images—but also a new epoch in the history of cuisine. Gastronomes had long claimed that cuisine is one of the fine arts, most famously in Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste*, (1825), and artists had occasionally put culinary forms to use, as in Marinetti and Fillia's *Futurist Cookbook* (1932), but the art historical establishment—even after increasing the number of the muses with the inclusion of new art forms such as photography and cinema—had never seriously considered cuisine as being within their purview. However, once the plastic arts were opened up to the ephemera of all the senses, to the performativity of production, and to the interactivity of techniques, a new epoch dawned. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the moment of Spoerri's gesture coincided with the greatest transformation of Western cuisine in over a century, the beginnings of what would become the French Nouvelle Cuisine, whose genius (and excesses) continue to inform contemporary haute cuisine, since many of today's greatest chefs began their careers at that time, and in turn many of the greatest young contemporary innovators were once their apprentices. The moment in 1998, when the French magazine *Beaux Arts* began to devote a column to cuisine, was emblematic of the grudging and belated acknowledgment of cuisine's role in the fine arts. However, the event came to pass at a time when the question was no longer relevant, since by then the notion of the "fine arts" itself no longer had any but historic relevance. Finally, that the "French gastronomic meal" (*le repas gastronomique français*) gained recognition last year by UNESCO as part of the world's Intangible Cultural Heritage is only icing on the cake.<sup>1</sup>

There is the flatness of the canvas and the flatness of the dinner plate. While the two must not be confused, homologies, analogies, and correspondences may well be sought. But we need to beware of anachronism, for the histories of different art forms are rarely synchronous. Furthermore, the aesthetic aspects of cuisine are not always congruous with its gastronomic qualities. There is much work to be done in parsing out these complex relations, both within the history of cuisine and concerning cuisine's relation to the other arts. The task has only recently begun.<sup>2</sup> For example, concerning the history of figuration, we are long familiar with the equivocation of the frame, which serves iconographically as window and ontologically as sign of the autonomy of the art object. Once the frame was discarded at the height of modernism, a new system was needed to signify such autonomy, for given the novelty, equivocation, and sheer bizarre-

ness of certain art works, quite often specific markers were indeed needed to indicate the very presence of the art, which might otherwise go unnoticed. This larger "frame" would be standardized as the white cube of the gallery and museum. What would happen if we rethought the genealogy of this pure white marker in terms of the history of the bourgeois dinner table and the haute cuisine restaurant—both conceived at the threshold of modernity, after the French Revolution—where the white linen tablecloth and white porcelain plate are both *de rigueur*? Unlike the white tablecloth of the French court—the epitome of which was Versailles under Louis XIV, where cuisine was one art among many, and where all the arts existed in common splendor, each directed by a specific protocol in the service of a highly regulated and codified ritual, all with one aim, the celebration of the divine glory of the King—the restaurant setting is centered on food alone. Here, the table setting becomes a sort of focusing mechanism to foreground the cuisine, well on its way to becoming an autonomous (art) object, as gastronomes of the epoch like Brillat-Savarin would have it.

As a case in point, I would like to analyze a superb, beautiful and exemplary dish created by Daniel Boulud for his New York restaurant Daniel, the complexities of which will evoke many issues concerning the aesthetics of contemporary cuisine—*Tai Snapper Ceviche with Celery Vinaigrette: Tapioca Pearls, Shaved Radishes, Northern Lights Caviar*. "The snapper is cured in salt, sugar and Buddha's Hand lemon zest, and then cut into cubes and seasoned with finger limes and lemon vinaigrette. The ceviche is served in a shallow bowl brushed with celery juice, and garnished with shaved radish, compressed celery, pickled Buddha's Hand lemon, avocado triangles, tapioca pearls seasoned with Espelette and olive oil, and a brunoise of jalapeño. A chilled fresh celery-fennel juice is poured over the ceviche tableside. The dish is topped with a crisp bread tuile and a small quenelle of Northern Lights Caviar (from North Dakota) and crème fraîche." (The version depicted here also includes sea cress sprouts and sea urchin.)

1. I was among the group of specialists assembled by the IEHCA to prepare the dossier for UNESCO. Two aspects of the discussions were striking, and give rise to much thought: first, what it means to deem cuisine "immaterial," seemingly a contradiction; second, the fact that the very object of the dossier was not immediately apparent, entailing lively preliminary debate hovering between *la table française*, *la cuisine française*, *la haute cuisine française*, etc. What might appear at first glance as mere semantic nuances in fact evokes vast cultural issues.
2. See Cecilia Novero, *Antidiets of the Avant-Garde: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), and Allen S. Weiss, *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* (State University of New York Press, 2002).
3. The recent Arcimboldo exhibition at the Sénat in Paris, with an accompanying catalogue, might well be reconsidered in relation to the culinary imagination.
4. For an extraordinary consideration of the sea urchin, see Xavier Girard, *L'oursin* (Marseille: André Dimanche Éditeur, 2010).

The vast brilliant white field of the plate's rim borders a shallow hollowed center, the bowl proper, decorated with a simple whorl pattern (akin to the ever-present whorls and swirls in Japanese sake cups and tea bowls that give dynamism to the works) of a yellow just slightly more green and a tone slightly more saturated than that of the young celery leaves and avocado triangles of the recipe. The relation of rim and hollow to the food is analogous to that of the frame and matting of a watercolor. The dish—and we should note that in both English and French, the same word is used for the receptacle and what it contains, for plate and food, a fact central to all culinary design concerns—is an abstraction of great beauty, a mosaic formed of fragments of the ecosphere, as if Arcimboldo briefly abandoned figuration to experiment with abstraction;<sup>3</sup> or a painterly puzzle, to be resolved to reveal a Surreal garden, or else a *Still Life With Urchin* by some modern master, perhaps Dali himself, fascinated as he was by these unlikely foodstuffs;<sup>4</sup> or a culinary rebus awaiting decipherment, evoking a new *Rite of Spring*. For every dish originates in a nascent still life, consisting of the ingredients assembled for preparation, thus every dish is fundamentally a figuration of whole foodstuffs reduced to abstraction by the successive operations of cutting, slicing, dicing, paring, boiling, broiling, frying, and countless other means of culinary transformation.<sup>5</sup> The chromaticism of the dish is somewhere between that of Gauguin and late-period Bonnard: one can almost taste the mild astringency of the colors, and feel the freshness of a spring evening. Spring of the raw, the fresh, the chilled; spring of more saturated reds and oranges already prefiguring summer; spring of light greens and translucent whites.<sup>6</sup>

At this juncture, one need offer no apology for such seemingly subjective similes, for such fantastic metaphorical and allegorical references, which in Western art criticism would be considered frivolous, indeed mere daydreams. What used to be commonplaces of food criticism, mere rhetorical filler, have been given new depth by recent theoretical considerations of the synaesthetic basis of aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> To be treated as an art, cuisine must share the symbolic matrix of the arts. In Japan, for example, the link between the seasons and the arts, especially cuisine, is absolute and fundamental to the culture, such that a culinary composition evokes not merely a given season, but is determinate to almost a specific day of the year in the general aesthetic scheme of things, aligning the dish with both literary and painterly references. While in the West we are far from such precision and complexity, increasing attention to the relations between ecology and cuisine is creating new levels and forms of taste, beauty, and symbolism.

Much of the history of Western landscape criticism and theory has suffered from treating the garden like a picture, forgetting the evidence of the body, the history of the senses, the realm of the imagination. Gastronomic criticism should take a lesson from this. The image that we have been examining documents but a

moment of stasis between two performances: the creativity of the chef (seconded by the underchefs who realized this particular version), counterbalanced by the gastronomically informed pleasure of the diner. This brief moment between two performances, between two regimes of knowledge, is of very limited and very specific duration, for the springtime freshness of the dish depends to a great extent not only on the color scheme and the delicate balance of acidity and astringency that binds the flavors, but especially on the physical chill of the ingredients, notably the celery-fennel juice. The dish must be eaten chilled. Once the chill is gone, the dish loses its attraction, like oysters taken off the ice for too long a time. Proper temperature is crucial for enjoying raw, smoked, and cured seafood such as sushi, which is why the best sushi establishments serve one piece at a time, eaten almost literally from chef's hand to client's mouth. There are, however, means of extending the visual pleasure, such as serving the fish on ice, as illustrated by a sashimi selection arranged by chef Hashimoto Kenichi at the Kyoto restaurant Ryozanpaku. Every detail of a dish, whether practical or decorative, can set a mood, sometimes truly profound. And what appears as mere decoration may in fact have a hidden use value. The extension of visual pleasure by icing also extends the time of reflection, permitting reverie. The creator of Noh theater, Zeami, used the image of snow piling up in a silver bowl as a metaphor of stillness, and the fifteenth-century poet Jujuin Shinkei insisted that nothing is more beautiful than ice. Might not such thoughts add to our appreciation of the dish? For if a painting or bouquet can enhance the pleasures of a dish, cannot an idea, memory, or allusion do the same? A dish is both what it contains and what it evokes.

Thus Daniel Boulud's *Tai Snapper Ceviche* affords a brief moment of visual absorption before one plunges into the more complex synaesthetic realm of the senses by tasting the dish. Time is of the essence, and the syntax of a dish (the interrelation of all elements) reveals a temporal logic that guides our ways of eating. The visual is a support of the gustatory, expanded into synaesthetic splendor. We have been prepared for a certain complexity—hybrid, fusional, multinational—by the descriptive title, and, for those who bothered to do their research before dining,

5. The finest study to date of the culinary implications of the still life is Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked* (Harvard University Press, 1990; reprinted by Reaktion Books).

6. The theme of translucency is fascinating, and certainly deserves a major museum exhibition. Growing up in New York, I always heard that lox should be sliced so thin that one should be able to read *The New York Times* through it, an exigency not only gastronomic but also aesthetic and economic. The transformation of the opaque into the translucent and the transparent is one of the many wonders of both painting and cuisine.

7. One of the first, and still best, publications on the topic is "Synesthésies / Fusion des Arts," *Les cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 74 (Winter 2000-2001).





by the recipe: *taï* is among the most appreciated fish in Japan; ceviche and jalapeño are synonymous with Mexican cuisine (which also recently gained Intangible Cultural Heritage status); Northern Lights Caviar comes from a producer in North Dakota, the American frontier, and its source, paddlefish (cold water spoonbill), is a common substitute for Russian sturgeon caviar; Buddha's Hand lemon is evocative of Southeast Asia; Espelette (the emblem of Basque cuisine, this pepper originated in Mexico, thus its presence is yet another sign of the complexity of foodways); olive oil is the symbol and staple of the Mediterranean diet (which also just gained UNESCO status); and crème fraîche is a symbol of French cuisine, if ever there was one—a whirlwind of sites to match the visual dynamism of the dish. Given such

geographic complexity, what does it mean to present this dish as “French” cuisine?

The career trajectory of Daniel Boulud is a veritable allegory of contemporary French cuisine. Trained in Lyon, the traditional epicenter of French haute cuisine and one of the crucibles of the Nouvelle Cuisine, he ultimately chose New York as his domicile. One should remember that until the 1960s, in the USA haute cuisine was synonymous with French cuisine, which in turn was in most cases synonymous with the unequivocal signifiers of Escoffier's *Guide culinaire*—which summed up the glory of French nineteenth-century bourgeois cuisine and ruled the ovens of the world for half of the twentieth century—and that the best of this cooking was to be found in Manhattan. This began to





change in 1959 with the opening of The Four Seasons in New York, conceived by the Hungarian-Jewish-born restaurateur George Lang, the first major restaurant dedicated to creating a specifically American haute cuisine, attuned to both the seasons and local ingredients. Thus the Nouvelle Cuisine was not uniquely French, since it was contemporaneous with this most American event, characterized by the absorption of new techniques, ingredients, sensibilities, platings, symbols. Little by little, similar efforts were made around the world, and within a couple of generations, the most innovative cuisine would no longer be found only in Paris, Lyon, and a handful of sites spread across the French landscape, but worldwide, with cities like Tokyo, New York, and Hong Kong epitomizing the new internationalism and hybridization. (For what it's worth, consider the yearly listing of the *The S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants* or any other such list for a sense of this geographic decentering—the last listing contains only eight restaurants in France, though it must be admitted that many others on the list share French styles and techniques.)

Boulud is emblematic of the position of French cuisine in this syncretic matrix, where the presence of French cuisine

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8. See Allen S. Weiss, "How to Read a Menu," *Cabinet 6* (2002). Such use of simile, whether explicit in the language or implicit in the presentation of the dish, has become common in contemporary cuisine; sometimes it amuses, as with the present cocktail, sometimes it exasperates, as when anything sliced thin becomes a "carpaccio," or anything superimposed a "mille feuille."
  9. I have always wanted to write a *History of Ridicule*, which might well begin with the critique of a deconstructed stuffed cabbage: the stuffing is placed atop a layer of sour cream spread on a bed of sautéed cabbage and noodles, set on a huge Majolica plate in the form of a cabbage leaf, all of which is sprinkled with a fine dusting of sweet paprika. The potential ridicule of sprinkling, deconstruction, and the mimetic would mask the fact that this is certainly a very fine dish.

COMME UN COCKTAIL—FRÂICHEUR DE TOURTEAU À L'AVOCAT ET À LA MANGUE, ÉCUME AU CITRON VERT, COMPOSÉ BY CHEF PHILIPPE CARALP AT THE RESTAURANT LE MÉJANE, IN THE LOT RIVER VALLEY TOWN OF

in New York now means something very different than it did fifty years ago, when French chefs defended their cuisine like a bastion (not unlike those French writers who not so long ago published a manifesto to save the French language, extolling its Latin roots and defending it from American barbarisms, not realizing that a language, like a cuisine, survives through syncretism and exchange, not purification and a spurious search for origins.) Today, both “France” and “New York” signify open systems, sites of *métissage*, fields of experimentation, nomadic passages. The specific genealogy of the *Tai Snapper Ceviche* originates in both the overturning of culinary hierarchies innate to traditional French cuisine, and the great culinary exchange between France and East Asia that was an integral aspect of the Nouvelle Cuisine. This exchange went both ways, since Japanese chefs apprenticed in France in increasing numbers beginning in the late 1960s, peaking in the 1980s when the great Japanese chef and teacher Tsuji Shizuo did so much to foster gastronomic exchange between the two countries. Probably the most evident visible manifestation of this syncretism on the French side of the equation occurred in new styles of presentation (plating), influenced by *kaiseki* cuisine, the haute cuisine of Kyoto traditionally linked to the tea ceremony. As for hierarchies, consider that the salad took on new forms and increased prestige, the equal to such forgotten glories as the *Salade de homard*, *de filets de volaille et de truffes noires* (much more complex than its title, as it contains lobster, spiny lobster, chicken, turkey, red partridge, crayfish, shrimp, ham, escarole, mushrooms, pickles, olives, truffles) described by Lucien Tendret, the nephew of Brillat-Savarin, in *La Table au Pays de Brillat-Savarin* (1892).

In fact, due to their very form as combinatory mechanisms, salads are one of the great experimental fields of cuisine, and as French cuisine became less tradition-bound and more experimental, salads took on greater importance. At the height of the Nouvelle Cuisine in 1975, for the very first time two restaurants noted a salad as one of their specialties in the *Guide Michelin*: Alain Chapel with a *Salade de homard*, and Jacques Pic with a *Salade de pêcheurs au xérès*. (In this context, in 1979 I savored an extraordinary *Salade de papaye* in Alain Senderens’s restaurant L’Archestrate.) It is interesting to note that all three of these salads contain seafood. The sundry salads based on mango and papaya, with the seafood element sometimes reduced to the sole use of the fermented fish-based sauce *nuoc mam*, are staples of Southeast Asian cuisine, and ultimately served as part of the inspiration for certain French inventions. Given changes in taste, diet, travel, and knowledge, such salads are now ubiquitous and extraordinarily popular. Salads constitute a very broad category, and of course such categories often overlap with others. In the general scheme of things, or at least within a certain Gallic form of the culinary imagination, it would be acceptable to homologize a ceviche with other forms of seafood salads, at least for heuristic purposes, all the while understanding that in Spain or Mexico or

New York, such a dish might be otherwise classified and served.

For a related example, consider a recent innovation at the restaurant Le Méjane, in the Lot River valley town of Espalion: *Comme un Cocktail—Fraîcheur de Tourteau à l’avocat et à la mangue, écume au citron vert*, composed by chef Philippe Caralp. “Cook the crab in a court bouillon and remove the flesh. Use the carcass to make a bisque, reduce to a syrupy consistency, and flavor with lime and olive oil to realize a crab vinaigrette. Make a mayonnaise into which is mixed the half of the vinaigrette, which in turn is mixed into the crab flesh. Mix the diced mango, avocado, and tomato, season with salt, pepper, olive oil and lime. For the foam, prepare in a siphon the crème fraîche with lime-juice, a bit of olive oil, and salt. Place progressively in a cocktail glass a teaspoon of the remaining vinaigrette, a soup spoon of the crab mixture, a soup spoon of the fruit tartare, and top with the whipped cream and a few orange zests. Decorate with a gressin.” (The *gressin*, or breadstick, is not shown in the photo.) For each such dish, it is crucial to ask both what are the sources of its hybridity, and what are the markers of its relation to the French tradition. It is perhaps not without interest that crème fraîche plays a role in both the *Tai Snapper Ceviche* and *Comme un Cocktail*: in the former mainly in classic relation to the caviar, where the central position of the dab of cream highlights its presence; in the latter regarding the totality of the dish, an innovative transformation of ceviche, which traditionally relies solely on a lime/onion/oil flavor base. Structural linguistics has taught us to determine pertinent features of a language to differentiate it from other languages and dialects of the same group; we might use this technique to determine pertinent features of dishes, in order to differentiate and even catalogue variants (e.g., ceviche/seviche/cebiche), as I have done for 77,760 variants of stuffed cabbage in *Autobiographie dans un chou farci* (2006). This is all the more important in an epoch when the site-specificity of regional cuisines is in ever greater competition with cuisines both hybrid (international, thus potentially from anywhere and everywhere) and molecular (universal, thus from nowhere).

The temporality of a dinner or a dish is complex. Modern European cooking was radically transformed in the nineteenth century by the adoption of the *service à la russe*, that is, a meal that follows a fixed sequence of dishes, as distinguished from the earlier *service à la française*, where a great variety of dishes were placed on the table simultaneously, a practice that survives in today’s *smörgåsbord*. No such standardization reigns in the order of eating the component elements of any given dish, and certain dishes visually indicate their own gustatory logic. Visually, the presentation of a dish is a matter of design, and may well be compared to the other arts and crafts: the precision of knife work in creating forms is not unlike that of the painter with a palette knife or the sculptor with a chisel; the disposition of the foodstuffs on the plate certainly bears traces, both conscious and unconscious, of mosaics, stained glass, wood marquetry, and of course painting



and sculpture; and the occasional tableside carving, saucing, and flaming are gesturally choreographed, certainly not as formal as the rituals of a tea ceremony, but nevertheless in accord with the dish and the general tone of the restaurant.

However, all too often, especially with the newest, most unfamiliar inventions, one is often confused as to how a dish is to be eaten; brilliant are those where the manner of eating is indicated by the form of the plating. While the stratification of elements (crab, fruit, cream) in the *Comme un Cocktail* is visually pleasing, to simply eat in descending order would be unsatisfying, and such a sequence would belie the inspiration of the dish, to say the least, as the richness of the cream would dull the palate for the rest. Both the name and the receptacle offer clues. On the one hand, “Like a cocktail” is visually “like a dessert,” resembling a parfait, with its layer of highly colored fruits topped with a portion of whipped cream—the simile establishing a sort of playful deception hiding very different gustatory pleasures. This reading of the arrangement suggests eating by scooping up the different layers from the bottom up, so as to combine the tastes.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the fact that in recent memory this sort of glass has been used to serve ceviche in upscale Mexican restaurants offers a structural homology, revealing the initial state of the dish as a form of deconstructed ceviche. However, since the term “cocktail” suggests the act of shaking or mixing to homogenize the elements, and the traditional cocktail glass in which it is served evokes the classic question concerning martini recipes, “Shaken or stirred?”, the need to mix the three layers is further implied. Thus the initial presentation is chosen for reasons of visual composition, awaiting the final culinary gesture of mixing on the part of the diner.

As for the *Tai Snapper Ceviche*, the geometric rigidity of the bread tile (in itself a tight composition—the only element of the dish with right angles, a particularly unnatural form in this natural “landscape”—constituting a classic caviar canapé) sets it apart from the other components, as does the fact that the celery-fennel juice is poured around (and not over) it, suggesting that it be eaten separately. In doing so, the roof tile is removed to reveal the rest of the dish in its beauty of controlled chaos, as the familiar Eurocentric richness of caviar and cream gives way, with a crunch, to the tropical complexities of a dish citric to the third degree. Here, the formal differences in certain applications of flavor offer a lesson in taste and delicateness: while the celery-fennel juice infuses all the elements (as should the cream in the *Méjane* cocktail), the jalapeño brunoise is placed in little dots on the plate. Such separation and concentration of condiments has long existed in the *Nouvelle Cuisine*: such arabesques and drippings of sauces, pools of juice reductions, dustings of spices, tiny piles of salt, dots of flavored oils, shavings of truffles have often been greeted with ridicule by unwitting food critics (whose other favorite subject of criticism has long been small portions

on large plates). To the contrary, I would argue that these pools, dribbles, and dustings (which necessitate large plates) are among the greatest culinary innovations of our time, as they serve not only as modern design elements, but also resolve a longstanding gastronomic conundrum, exemplified by the ineluctable question of salt: while every chef knows the proper amount of salt for each dish, it is impossible to gauge the gustatory threshold of each diner, both culturally and physiologically determined, for such basics as salt and sugar. The contemporary use of these condiments as design elements, above and beyond the minimum amount that might already infuse the food, serves the practical purpose of separating them from the other foodstuffs, thus permitting an accurate tableside dosing, each to his own taste. Design in the service of gastronomy.<sup>9</sup>

As is the case for all arts, knowledge increases pleasure. (This rings truer in French: *le savoir augmente la saveur*). What we bring to the performance determines what we shall receive. Petty as it may seem to discuss such matters, the difference between appreciating a great dish and ruining it depends on the diner’s work of knife and fork. Indeed, one can eat a dish in any manner desired, but then again, one may also use a Rembrandt as an ironing board, as Duchamp once infamously suggested. We all know, for example, that there is optimal seating in every theater, according to acoustics and sight lines; but how many of us actually know which seats are acoustically best in any given theater? There are degrees of appreciation (here connoisseurship might seem too haughty a term, but it shouldn’t), and it would be erroneous to dismiss as sheer snobbism the knowledge of such minutiae that increase pleasure. We should never underestimate our zones of ignorance. To cite an extreme example, Japanese ceramic aficionados insist that in order to fully appreciate the color of celadon, the work should be viewed at ten in the morning on a sunny autumn day, in a room facing north with the light coming from a single *shoji* paper door. Before dismissing this as pedantry, one should at least conduct the experiment. But the experiment is complex, as one needs then to compare the appearance of the celadon under different lighting conditions, natural and artificial, throughout the year; to compare it with other shades of celadon, and then other pottery surfaces; to consider the manifestations of celadon in painting and poetry, so as to ascertain the ideal type; to use it in a tea ceremony, so as to get the feel of the piece; then to put it away for a year, so as to let the work of memory, and anticipation, transform our perceptions. Such is true connoisseurship. Should we attempt anything less for a ceviche!

Now that cuisine is finally making its way into an expanded aesthetic realm, and now that aesthetics has become a totally international domain, a certain rethinking of art criticism in the light of gastronomy is in order. In a sense, Daniel Spoerri not only understood the formal issues of tilting plane surfaces, but

(OPPOSITE) TAI SNAPPER CEVICHE WITH CELERY VINAIGRETTE; TAPIOCA PEARLS, SHAVED RADISHES, NORTHERN LIGHTS CAVIAR, COMPOSED BY DANIEL BOULUD FOR HIS NEW YORK RESTAURANT DANIEL. PHOTO



also the existential ones concerning the possible transformations of a dish, destined not to become still life, but *vanitas*. A beauty ephemeral, when the pleasure of gourmandise causes all form and thoughts of formalism to collapse, all niceties to be set aside, such that the vestiges of formalism are ultimately dissolved in the intensity of time passing and taste fading, to be inscribed as recipe and revived as memory, awaiting the next meal. 7

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