

# On Making Sense of Recipes

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I address some ways of making sense of, and so of understanding, recipes. First, I make clear the plausibility of a recipe having aesthetic significance, thus situating recipes as continuous with other aspects of our lives and experiences, both artistic and non-artistic. My notion of “aesthetic” here derives from Ludwig Wittgenstein. Recipes and cooking should be regarded as legitimate topics for discussion in philosophical aesthetics. Second, I also highlight how some recipes and cookbooks may actually be aesthetically significant in another way: they encourage attunement to aesthetic features of cooking and food in order to cultivate in their audience an openness to aesthetic significance generally. This kind of preparation is consistent with Wittgenstein’s aims in his “Lectures on Aesthetics” (1938), where he is engaged in preparing the reader to speak about aesthetic matters by emphasizing its pervasive potential significance.

## 1. Cookbooks and puzzling writing

Consider the following discussion of putting salad onto a plate in Fergus Henderson and Trevor Gulliver’s *The Book of St. JOHN*, under a heading marked “dressings”:

If stock is the lubrication of the kitchen, then dressings are the lubrication of the menu... [Y]ou must learn to master The Claw. Hold your hand before you with fingers spread and curled, as if you were a puma poised to take a swipe. Pounce upon your salad!... coax the dressing over the leaves... and place it on the plate. Hold briefly before removing your hand and *do not touch again* until you attack it with your fork... if you are tempted to adjust even a leaf then you are doomed. You have ruined the perfect balance created by The Claw and the structure will collapse. (Henderson & Gulliver 2019, p. 96)

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I can imagine various quite reasonable responses to reading this. I think many people might read the beginning and then skip over the whole discussion, especially as untrimmed, it takes up the better part of a page. I could see some reading it and finding it simply humorous. But then I can also imagine one thinking, “what is going on here?”, and spending time trying to sort through possible answers to that question. My own response was admittedly of this last type.

In this paper I provide evidence for an analogy between what might uncontroversially be called “aesthetic activities” such as art-making, design, decorating, etc., and some uses of recipes. That is, I claim that some uses of recipes could be considered “aesthetic.” This is potentially useful and important because emphasizing it could help one to make sense of, and thus to understand better, their experiences with these recipes. What I mean by this is that, for instance, sometimes we flip through a cookbook and read a recipe whose instructions seem odd, or we watch a cooking show that annoys us with its seriousness, or we are maybe even served food that strikes us as especially distinctive, etc. By prompting one to think of these experiences, wherein recipes are involved at some point, as at least potentially involving aesthetic aspects might help make sense of them, to some degree. That understanding could also then inform our future experiences with, or uses of, recipes—and it could also inform other experiences that might have an aesthetic component. Now insofar as some, but not all, aesthetic activity is also artistic activity, I am also addressing an analogy between “food and art.”<sup>1</sup> Though in general I think this analogy only goes so far, we do at times speak about food and art similarly.<sup>2</sup> My suspicion is that that interest in this comparison actually stems from the potential aesthetic significance of food, in the senses I aim to elaborate in the course of this paper.

Now simply saying that “recipe-uses might be aesthetic,” on its own, might well be of no use to many. This is in part because “aesthetic” can mean a variety of things in different contexts (see for instance Koren 2010), but also because aesthetic aspects of things can often be puzzling in their own right. Further, one very common use of “aesthetic” is when it has the dismissive sense of “merely aesthetic”, that is, “it’s just how it looks,” for example. In this sense “aesthetic” can imply insignificance.

<sup>1</sup> See (Levinson, 2016, p. 16), where he helpfully addresses this distinction.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance this discussion between chef/restaurateur David Chang and art critic Jerry Saltz: <https://www.theringer.com/2019/2/28/18244556/cooking-as-an-art-with-jerry-saltz>. Chang seems particularly interested in “whether food/cooking can be art.”

Here I will employ a notion of “aesthetic” that stands in opposition to such a conception. I find it borne out in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “Lectures on Aesthetics” (see Wittgenstein 1967), but it is also present elsewhere (see for example Danto 2002, Danto 2014, Klevan 2018, and Levinson 2016). While Wittgenstein does not define the term, he nevertheless uses it as a way to highlight potential meaningfulness or significance. I will return to this below in section IV.

My approach here is as follows: I will take cookbooks as my prime example of recipe-uses, as they are one common way people access recipes. Nothing I am saying is particular to cookbooks however. I could just as well make use of cooking blogs, for instance, or perhaps podcasts or television series. These would all contain instances of recipes being given to others, and some as well might include instances of *making sense* of uses of recipes, both within recipes and in preparatory text. It is also the case that the recipes and accompanying discussions can sometimes prompt questions and confusion. Questions and confusion can be useful and instructive.

The other main text I will appeal to is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “Lectures on Aesthetics” (Wittgenstein 1967; the lectures were given in 1938) as representative of a certain kind of approach to aesthetics. By making my case for these uses of recipes being amenable to this way of conceiving of and talking about aesthetics, I will then have established the possibility of the aesthetic significance of recipes. In fact, some of these recipe-uses are doing this themselves, but just without using the philosophical jargon. Putting Wittgenstein’s text alongside them serves to bring this out. At any rate, this is my first goal: to establish that it makes sense to talk about recipes as possibly having aesthetic significance.<sup>3</sup>

My second goal is a claim about at least some cookbooks (again, certain uses of recipes) and also about Wittgenstein’s “Lectures on Aesthetics.” I will show that that both are engaged in preparing their readers to go on and appeal to

<sup>3</sup> This is *not* to say that all recipes always have a certain kind of significance. The question about whether anything in some circumstance actually has a particular significance—or meaning—is a question for particular people in particular circumstances to sort through. This is one of the points, as I understand it, of Wittgenstein’s writings generally, and of his occasional talk of “meaning as use” (e.g. Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 43) more specifically. This is also why I pay attention to uses of recipes.

aesthetic reasons when making sense of things generally.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the employment of recipes actually serves as a means to champion a kind of openness to possibilities of significance.

I do have subsidiary goals as well in terms of my discussing cookbooks and Wittgenstein's lectures. I use them for different reasons, though I do want to say that it makes sense to think of them as having similar goals, with respect to aesthetic aspects of things. In terms of the cookbooks and the recipes in them, I want to help the effort to clear a path for cooking generally to make its way into philosophical aesthetics. It is wrong to see cooking and food as somehow not worthy of serious philosophical thought. In terms of Wittgenstein's lectures, I want to emphasize an aspect of his work that tends to get overlooked or ignored: its practical usefulness. It is wrong to regard his work as "purely negative," or as a "quietist," whether in philosophical aesthetics or in philosophy more generally.

Since I am indeed concerned to show that these uses of recipes and Wittgenstein's lectures can be said to have similar goals, I do not assume that either has priority over the other. They are simply going about their respective tasks differently, as they are rooted in different places. My belief is that each can help elucidate the other: each can aid in making sense of the other. That "making sense" is an ordinary "making sense."<sup>5</sup> Hence at times my admittedly "personal" passages in what is to follow. These are instances where I am trying to establish something as making sense, in an ordinary way and not on the basis of implicit (perhaps philosophical) assumptions. Writing here as a reader of Wittgenstein's lectures and of these cookbooks, I take making sense of them as an important part my task.

## 2. On uses of recipes

It might be helpful for what I have to say, to begin by highlighting a few relevant facts about recipes and how we use them. I intend the distinctions I make to be relatively ordinary in nature, which is to say, I regard them as non-technical and I assume their applications are somewhat flexible. My concern is not to define

<sup>4</sup> I am reluctant to identify the kind of preparation I'm focusing on here with other traditions that treat development of character, as my focus here is largely *formal*, as opposed to content-based. As such, it is rather austere. I elaborate on what this amounts to in sections IV-VI.

<sup>5</sup> Compare: "If you want to understand the use of the word 'meaning', look for what are called 'explanations of meaning'" (Wittgenstein, 2009, sec. 560).

terms here, but rather to clarify starting points for my discussion, more-or-less, by appealing to a kind of (linguistic) description that should sound generally right.

First, we have a “recipe,” which is what you see printed in a book or magazine, for instance, or, say, what you hear at the start of a segment on a cooking show. Some are very detailed, some are rather vague. If we wish, we may say something like, a recipe is “concerned with the more or less complicated production of routine meals or the orchestration of feasts” (Floyd & Forster, 2003, p. 1). Or again, they are “procedure(s) that we can use in the real world and that will lead to a specific concrete result when applied in a specific case” (Suppes, 1984, p. 240), where that result is something one may eat. Finally, we might also say a recipe “comprises the array of repeatable aspects of a dish whose replication would deliver a dish of the same sort” (Borghini, 2015, p. 722). Any of these formulations is useful to start because they fit more or less with how we talk about the things we call “recipes.” For my purposes here I am putting aside interesting disputable candidates for being called a “recipe.”

By “recipe-uses,” I simply mean the various kinds of uses that a person or people have made, or could make, of recipes.<sup>6</sup> One might of course use a recipe to prepare food as indicated by the recipe. Part of my focus in this paper however is to consider and call attention to other uses for recipes as well. Now of course, again, one can use them to form part of a cookbook. But I think we are reasonably familiar with many other types of uses, many of which are not directly tied to preparing food. For some admittedly personal examples from my own bookshelf and experiences:

Learn about ingredients/technique (Escoffier 1969; Pépin 1976; Dunlop 2007), learn about a restaurant (Morin, McMillan, & Erickson 2018; Appleman & Lindgren 2008; Rose 2013; Batali 2002, Henderson & Gulliver 2019), learn about a particular person/chef (Rose 2013; Hazan 2003; Brock 2014), advertise a chef/restaurant (Batali 2002), correct preconceptions (DeKnight 1962; parents, friends), prepare for adulthood (Rombauer & Rombauer 1973), improve nutrition (Rushdie 1988; Katzen 1977), remind one of childhood (Rombauer & Rombauer 1973), problem solve (e.g., *seriouscats.com*), display lineage/affiliation/tradition, say on a shelf in a restaurant (Brock 2014; DeKnight 1962; Pépin 1976), learn about a people/tradition/affiliation (Dunlop 2007; Nillsson 2015; Rushdie 1988; Olney 1970), express familial

<sup>6</sup> Heldke (1998) similarly highlights a diversity of uses of recipes. Though we have different aims, I am sympathetic to and appreciate much of her approach.

connection (from parents, grandparents), comfort a person or oneself (Rombauer & Rombauer 1973), etc.

I want again to highlight that these examples are certainly drawn from my own context and situation, and they stem from my own interests, biases, and cultural context. But in thinking about something like “uses of recipes,” we each start in the middle of things—we already do know and believe some things about recipes and what people do with them.<sup>7</sup> In thinking about cookbooks, I want to bring these things to bear explicitly. This list serves to highlight that we may use recipes, or even just one recipe, in varieties of ways. These various uses show that recipes may have multiple kinds of significance for us.

Something else worth remarking on, even just on the basis of this list, is that recipes can be used by various parties. That is, one may read a recipe in order to learn something about an ingredient. But then there is also the person or people who wrote the recipe, who may have had in mind various uses related or unrelated to what our reader wanted from it. So for instance when I think I might read the salad passage with which I began this paper—which, by the way, may as well “count” as a recipe—, for me it brings about a certain nostalgia for meals I’ve eaten at that restaurant, and I think about the salads I’ve eaten there, salads I’ve recently made, etc. I have indeed read that passage, and others in that cookbook, to induce just this nostalgia. It is not clear to me, and nor does it matter, whether this use of that recipe coincides with intentions of the authors or whether the use was “foreseen” in some way. This is just to say that the recipe “makes its own way in the world,” just as a poem, music, film, or even words do (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954, p. 470). So there is the production (writing) of a recipe and its corresponding uses, and then there are the many receptions of a recipe, as well as uses. So when thinking about recipe-uses I’m going to assume it makes sense to consider both the production and reception sides of things. Both perspectives seem to have at least potential significance for understanding any particular instance. And if we’re considering cookbooks, as I am here, it will be well to consider both perspectives with respect to those as well.

<sup>7</sup> This is a point that bears on all of my discussion here. I am sympathetic then to Jerrold Levinson’s notion of “aesthetic contextualism” (e.g., Levinson, 2016, pp. 17-27). I will not dwell on this here, but there is also a relationship to Wittgenstein’s philosophy. See a suggestion made by Burton Dreben: “the Quinean epistemologist—not unlike the Hegelian or the Wittgensteinian reader—the reader of Quine begins ‘in mediis rebus’ (or perhaps with a bit more daring plunges in in medius res)” (Dreben, 1994, p. 441). We come to our experiences knowing some things, and that helps us make sense of things generally.

In his *La Cuisine C'est Beaucoup Plus Que Les Recettes*, as the title implies, the chef Alain Chapel makes a distinction between a recipe and cuisine (Chapel, 1980). He begins the forward by saying “why would one have wanted a cookbook that wouldn’t be just a catalog of recipes?” (Chapel, 1980, p. 11, my trans.). He then proceeds to sketch recipes as “exact,” “definitive,” and as stifling to discussion. The recipe, he says, “is a little like a prison.”<sup>8</sup> So his book is supposed to be something more than a catalog of recipes, something not mechanical, cold, and academic. This “more” is perhaps difficult to pin down. One way to characterize part of my goals with this paper, however, is to detail one possible reading of this “more.”

One might get the idea that cuisine is ineffable; the moment you articulate words you’re being too precise. You “get it” or you do not. I think this view is wrong. To start, I want to say—I think uncontroversially—that surely cuisine, whatever it is, may be related to certain recipe-uses. Chapel’s book is a cookbook, after all, and it does contain recipes.

### 3. Cookbooks and writing about food

Having established that recipes may be used in many different ways, for different purposes, I want to examine some attempts to articulate things about cooking that could be what “more” Chapel could be striving for. This is a particular use of recipes that is of interest to me here. In order to understand it, it makes sense to consider what people have to say who, for instance, cook food, think about food, and write about food.<sup>9</sup> I say this is worth doing because “what they say” can actually constitute attempts at making sense of recipe-uses: sometimes they are (or merely believe themselves to be) articulating things ordinarily left implicit.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that Chapel is likely to have had familiarity with the views of Marie-Antoine Carême, the 19<sup>th</sup> century French chef, particularly on the topic of the nature of cooking primarily as a system of “rules, norms, and values” (Ferguson, 2003, p. 42) that guide any articulation of recipes. This fits well with what I find in Chapel’s writing, and indeed with things Wittgenstein describes about aesthetic practice. (See (Ferguson 2003) for an informative discussion of Carême’s significance.)

<sup>9</sup> The situation is analogous to paying attention to what critics and art historians say about an artwork, for instance, even if one is looking at its meaning as a “philosophical question.”

<sup>10</sup> A note on my uses of “recipe” and of “recipe-uses”: we ordinarily just use the word “recipe,” to be sure, but it seems to me we are generally interested in—and assume—particular recipe-uses when we do.

Luke Barr's *Provence, 1970* is an account of soon-to-be influential American chefs and gourmands living in France in the late 1960s. His overall argument is these people had a major hand in effecting a "new world" of American food culture (Barr, 2013, pp. 8-9). One of the chefs/writers at the center of the story is Richard Olney. Barr says of him that he, "compared cooking to an art—to painting. He would attempt to teach improvisation by laying out basic preparations and pointing to various possible variations. Blindly following step-by-step instructions, a paint-by-numbers approach, was not the way to learn" (Barr, 2013, p. 244).

In his cookbook *Simple French Food*, Olney himself writes, "You, the cook, must also be the artist, bringing understanding to mechanical formulas, transforming each into an uncomplicated statement that will surprise or soothe a gifted palate, or from your knowledge drawing elements from many to formulate a new harmony. For such is creativity, be it in the kitchen or in the studio: application of personal expression to an intimate understanding of the rules" (Olney, 1974, p. 11). These sentiments certainly seem in line with Chapel's. One way to elaborate on what it is to move beyond "mechanical" step-by-step cooking is to say that it involves expression (presumably, the preparing of food) of an "intimate understanding of the rules." And presumably "the rules" are, at least, the recipes. Now just as is the case with Chapel's book, *Simple French Food* is a cookbook, and it too contains recipes. But it also contains a fair amount of text that is not "a recipe" in the strict sense—but could certainly relate to recipe-uses. This passage is one instance of that. (Olney's expansive writing is not limited to the preface; it occurs throughout the cookbook, within recipes and apart from them. As a reader, I can only assume he took the task of writing very seriously, which makes sense given what he has to say.)

Marcella Hazan's *Essentials of Italian Cooking* begins with a section entitled "Understanding Italian Cooking." Prior to any recipes, she explains how one might actually say there is no such thing as "Italian" cooking, properly speaking. She explains various distinct regional approaches to cooking in virtue of geography, agriculture, produce, climate, and local culture, generally (Hazan, 1992, pp. 3-5). She also makes the further point that "home cooking" (and an absence of Italian "*haute cuisine*") is perhaps the only thing that ties "Italian cooking" all together. Again, all of this is given to the reading under the heading of "understanding Italian cooking," in a cookbook, and prior to any recipes.

Mario Batali's *Babbo* cookbook is one that is no doubt influenced by Hazan.<sup>11</sup> He too spends a fair amount of time supplementing the recipes presented in the cookbook. In his introduction, he embraces "home cooking" as a standard for his restaurant and these recipes (Batali, 2002, p. 10); but he does at the same time make explicit that one can progress from "a mere list of ingredients and techniques to something really great." This happens via "personalization of the ingredients" (Batali, 2002, p. 8) but also as a consequence of the experience of dining. He details many of the choices made for Babbo, the restaurant—the point of this being "you think about all of these details when you're planning a special meal... recognize that you can set a tone with the kind of bread you serve, the kind of glasses you use, the kind of music (if any) you play, the type of napkin... each component depends on you" (Batali, 2002, p. 13). Again, what we see here is a cookbook that begins by, among other things, suggesting you might think about the type of napkin you put on your table. And it has made the point that this could be part of "something really great", or as Chapel would put it, *beaucoup plus*.

#### 4. Wittgenstein, "aesthetic," and more from cookbooks

I want now to turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Lectures on Aesthetics." In 1938, Wittgenstein gave a series of lectures to students at Cambridge on "aesthetics." This was the only time he gave a course on this topic, though he did emphasize the importance of music and of aesthetics and art more generally—both personally and philosophically.<sup>12</sup> The text we have today is the result of students' notes, edited into a coherent session-by-session account. I set for myself the task of making sense of what he says, and why—and also why it is all worth paying attention to. I want to use instances of recipe-uses to aid in that task. That is, I will take it that a certain group of recipe-uses do make sense—they are initially plausible at least—and I will use an understanding of them to help understand Wittgenstein. But then there is also the possibility of bringing things Wittgenstein says back to the recipe-uses, to aid in our understanding of those. To reiterate what I said earlier, I am concerned here to argue that these cookbooks and Wittgenstein's lectures are at least in part working toward two similar goals. My focus here in this section is the first goal, namely, to establish an expanded notion of what may be aesthetically significant that includes recipes.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., the *New York Times* obituary for Hazan (Severson 2013).

<sup>12</sup> See (Szabados 2004) for a crisp account of Wittgenstein's work in relation to the arts and aesthetics.

First let me present some things that Wittgenstein says. Wittgenstein has just finished a discussion of “how poetry should be read.” It is striking that the next topic is “people who know good suits” and going to a tailor (LA I, 13).<sup>13</sup> His examples for what *he* is calling “aesthetics” come from across the cultural spectrum, and so if it proves useful, inserting “recipes” and “food” into his discussions is entirely legitimate. He suggests that “if we talk of aesthetic judgments, we think, among a thousand things, of the Arts,” (LA I, 17) but his discussions and examples illustrate how what he is talking about is a much broader topic, since many, if not most, of the examples are in fact *not* from the Arts.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein’s examples also consider what I will call the “aesthetic activity” from various perspectives. So there is “the person who is trying on a suit” and then there is also the tailor. Wittgenstein considers how the tailor might make his way into the the practice of being a tailor. First, you “learn the rules. The cutter learns how long a coat is to be, how wide the sleeve must be, etc.” (LA I, 15). He compares this to learning to play music then: “he learns the rules—he is drilled—as in music you are drilled in harmony and counterpoint.”

Then Wittgenstein considers ways in which the tailor’s learning may proceed. He supposes he’s cut a coat, for instance, and that someone objects “this is too short.” One response is to cite the rules he has been taught. “No. It is right. It is according to the rules.” Perhaps, for example, he was taught a set of proportions for the various parts of the coat, and measurements would show that his coat was not too short.

Another response is perhaps to agree in part. One *could* say that in fact the coat is not according to the rules, even though the measurements fit the proportions he had been taught. This is possible, Wittgenstein says, when “I develop a feeling for the rules. I interpret the rules.” (Recall Olney’s phrase: an “intimate understanding of the rules.”) I make “an aesthetic judgment about the thing which is according to the rules in the [first sense].” The aesthetic judgment then can come about when I have learned what it is to operate according to the rules more mechanically, we might say, and then internalized them. We get a sense of the point of the rules—why they are as they are. One is then able to say for instance, that though this coat does not technically have the right

<sup>13</sup> I will make references to Wittgenstein’s lectures on aesthetics in this manner: “(LA *x*, *y*)” where *x* is the lecture number in (Wittgenstein 1967), and *y* is the paragraph number.

proportions, it is consistent with the point of, or spirit of, why those proportions are taken as rules in the first place in this practice.

We are now at last in a position to generalize slightly on this discussion and to say something more about the meaning of “aesthetic” I am relying upon. I will say first that his treatment of “aesthetics” can be frustrating, in that he addresses the subject in a way that does not tell us anything substantial or meaningful about, say an aesthetic object, or about art. Rather, his attention is primarily on how we talk about these things. So as Wittgenstein uses “aesthetic” in these lectures, it means something like: “not only taking into account how something looks (feels, sounds, etc.) but considering this in relation to *why* it might look (feel, sound, etc.) that way.” His use of “aesthetic” focuses on what we may perceive in experiencing something, but also what we might say about those perceptions.

The explanation of “why” the thing might look (feel, sound, etc.) that way will typically involve giving reasons. The “rules,” or how one was initially taught, will typically figure into the reasons, as well as an understanding of or estimation of the point of those rules. So Wittgenstein says, “in learning the rules you get a more and more refined judgment” where “more and more refined” indicates increased attention to differences (though he admits one may, of course, still be able to detect disharmony even if you haven’t learned about harmony). He then adds, “when we make an aesthetic judgment about a thing, we do not just gape at it and say: ‘Oh! How marvelous!’ We distinguish between a person who knows what he is talking about and a person who doesn’t” (LA I, 17). That is, they can at least say something that makes sense about what it is and why it is marvelous. And if they cannot then that suggests perhaps “they haven’t seen what’s in it” and they could be akin to a dog that “wags its tail when music is played.” In other words, to some degree they do not understand the thing they are talking about. Again, the idea is that making aesthetic claims about a thing indicates, in the best cases, *better understanding* of what the thing is. The aesthetic aspects are part of the significance of the thing, and part of what makes it that particular thing. Nowhere does Wittgenstein mean to say that these aesthetic aspects are necessarily either *good or bad*, however.

In fact, he reacts hostilely to that suggestion. Wittgenstein speaks at one point about “deterioration of German music” (LA I, 22). His student Rhees asks him then about his theory of deterioration and he erupts (or so I imagine), “Do

you think I have a theory? Do you think I'm saying what deterioration is?"<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein does not see his work in philosophy to be "saying what things are" (by giving a theory, or a definition, etc.) Of course Wittgenstein and Rhees each have musical preferences and even more general views about culture and nationality, etc. What interests Wittgenstein in this exchange when it resurfaces later in the lecture however is *how one supports the claim* about music deteriorating. Rhees seems perhaps too focused on simply the evaluative claim about German music. So: "you may say in protest, when I talk of deterioration: 'but this was very good.' I say: 'all right. But this wasn't what I was talking about.' I used it to describe a particular kind of development," (LAI, 33). Wittgenstein's focus is not on the evaluative judgment. He actually seems resigned to the fact disagreement may be unavoidable there. At any rate, he does not deem it *philosophy's* task to settle such a disagreement.

He then begins the second lecture by saying "you might think Aesthetics is a science telling us what's beautiful—almost too ridiculous for words. I suppose it ought to include also what sort of coffee tastes well" (LA II, 2). In other words, you and I are the ones who will decide, if we wish, whether a painting is beautiful or the coffee tastes horrible. He is simply dismissive of the idea that a definition of beauty or of good coffee would be of use. One might reasonably suggest he is avoiding the traditional philosophical question in fact. Instead, on his view you are going to give your reasons, and I may give mine.<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein's focus is on the reason-giving, not on any eventual decision we make on the basis of those reasons. He is concerned to say things about the possibility of aesthetic reasons and how in giving them it affords us a way to say more about the thing. It is not his task then to say what aesthetic significance actually consists in, in any substantive sense. Importantly, this parallels his work in the *Philosophical Investigations*, where again he does not offer any substantive view of "the nature of meaning" nor tell us "what meaning is."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See (LA I, 33). Also see (Wittgenstein, 2009, sec. 120): "When I talk about language (word, sentence, etc.), I must speak the language of every day."

<sup>15</sup> See (Fox & Guter 2018) for a discussion of aesthetic reasons.

<sup>16</sup> Very quickly, some characterizations of Wittgenstein's work to which I am sympathetic: Andrew Lugg (2000) expresses some generalizations about Wittgenstein's views of philosophy, based upon his close reading of the early sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*: "Philosophy is important because it exposes confusions about language, thought, reality, the human condition, and the rest;" "Wittgenstein is not saying that we cannot know anything;" (p. 180-181); "far from closing down discussion, he wants us to engage in it more," (p. 201). It's just that he is opposed

Wittgenstein suggests that it is an indication of a lack of aesthetic attention when you get “imitations” and when “thousands of people are interested in the minutest details” (LAI, 22). Similarly, he suggests, we see this when “a dining-room table is chosen more or less at random, when no one knows where it came from.” The furniture they have chosen have certain characteristics, to be sure, but they cannot say anything about why they do, nor why they chose them. Wittgenstein’s idea is that people are closed to part of the potential significance of the thing.

Part of the task for Wittgenstein’s reader is essentially to test out what he says to see if it squares with what we say and know. I am aiming to show in this paper that things he says do square with things we say and know, and that furthermore they can be useful in helping us clarify certain things. In this way what he says squares with our past and potentially aids us with the future.

So let’s turn back to things people have said in cookbooks, as, again, these are instances of people trying to make sense of recipes, and thus of how one might use them. They are written records, then, of exactly the sort of thing Wittgenstein is interested in. By reading Wittgenstein and these cookbooks together, we may better understand why they each say things they do. The point here, with respect to the cookbooks, is to substantiate the claim that recipes then are just like other aspects of our life that may take on, lead to, or embody aesthetic significance. The point with respect to Wittgenstein’s lectures, then, is to provide some support for Wittgenstein’s admittedly minimalist approach to “aesthetics” by showing the usefulness of distinctions he makes.

Still in the early pages of *La Cuisine c’est beaucoup plus que des recettes* and still prior to any recipes, Alain Chapel bemoans being in a “time of imitation.” He says, for instance that under the influence of Escoffier, cuisine was given to a kind of “decorative outbidding” (Chapel, 1980, p. 27). Today though (he was

to “the idea of philosophy as providing knowledge,” (p. 204). In the discussion that ensues, we can endeavor to make clear what we do in fact know. And Stanley Cavell says some helpful things about Wittgenstein’s philosophical work, that is, about the writing that comprises the *Investigations*: “the writer of the *Investigations* declares that philosophy does not speak first. Philosophy’s virtue is responsiveness” (Cavell, 1989, p. 74) and Wittgenstein “does not report, he does not write up results,” he “does not explain or justify, but describes how it is with [him].” and he see what Wittgenstein formulates as amounting to suggestions for the reader, and ideally a “suggestion penetrates past assessment and becomes part of the sensibility from which assessment proceeds...” (Cavell, 1969, pp. 70-71). We actually, in a way, make it a part of ourselves. Finally, see the footnotes below on (Floyd 2018), with which I am also highly sympathetic. (See also, Fox 201).

writing this in 1980), he sees different kinds of trends. (He cites raw, barely cooked beans as one instance of this *nouvelle cuisine*.) “More than ever,” he offers, “diners of the twentieth century are consuming... symbols. We have therefore come to imitating the menus of the great restaurants, like collections of the great couturiers.”<sup>17</sup>

Wittgenstein, again, sees this kind of imitation as indicative of a lack of aesthetic attention. That is, it suggests a lack of thought, or a loss of connection to the point of the details. Thus, people copy the precise arrangement of the Troisgros brothers’ mosaic of vegetables—another of Chapel’s examples. These chefs have forgotten to “learn to learn” (Chapel, 1980, p. 28). Both Chapel and Wittgenstein are consistent in what motivates their criticism.

One of Wittgenstein’s students’ notes for the passage about choosing a dining-table at random is: “This is what happens when a craft deteriorates. A period in which everything is fixed and extraordinary care is lavished on certain details; and a period in which everything is copied and nothing is thought about.”<sup>18</sup> What Wittgenstein and Chapel are both highlighting is a lack of “thinking about” the details and why one employs them. They also both see this development as bad, generally speaking. But Wittgenstein is less concerned with this value judgment than is Chapel.

It is perhaps not uncommon for people who talk about food to emphasize such things, which we may call, following Wittgenstein, “aesthetic points.” Or perhaps it’s not uncommon for *people who have a certain kind of care about food* to (for surely this is one motivation for writing a cookbook, for instance). In the Introduction to *The Book of St. JOHN*, Ferguson Henderson writes “our recipes are in a constant state of evolution—they are not being streamlined, nor refined, but they are an evolving subliminal comment on the nature of St. JOHN... There is something intangible about what we do—a menu can be quite St. JOHN-ish without being St. JOHN...” (Henderson & Gulliver, 2019, p. 7). This seems to me one way to articulate “a point” underlying the recipes contained in the book. It thereby underscores an aesthetic dimension of the recipes and of the

<sup>17</sup> Chapel raises a parallel between food and clothing here. We might think of a distinction made by the style writer Glenn O’Brien between “style” and “fashion”—the latter being the target of Chapel’s criticism here (as it was O’Brien’s). Again, I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the relevance of, and possible influence of, Carême on Chapel. It’s worth remarking that the emphasis on style over fashion seems regular and cyclical, perhaps as people come to assess why they are doing things in the ways that they are.

<sup>18</sup> These student notes are included in (Wittgenstein 1967) as footnotes.

restaurant's food. Henderson says that the recipes are a comment on the nature of the food as conceived by the restaurant. That is, they are guided in a particular way. This is how one could prepare different recipes with different ingredients in a different place, and still say the food is "St. JOHN-ish."

Henderson further characterizes all this as "something intangible." I would suggest we have circled back to another expression of Chapel's "more" that seemed ineffable. Of course, both of these writers have said more than a few things about that which they profess difficulty in speaking of. It is in fact part of articulating something about "the point" of aesthetic activity that we can seem to run up against our words and feel frustration in that. We can feel that our words aren't enough.<sup>19</sup> And then we say something indicating frustration.<sup>20</sup> But of course we've *not* said nothing.<sup>21</sup>

There is another reason compelling Henderson to assert there's "something intangible" about the recipes and the food. Also in the introduction, he offers that, "[t]hrough the course of this book I have come to realize that my understanding of restaurants and cooking is becoming increasingly cosmic; I think about the vibrations of a room, about the the Great Chef in the Sky and about the mystical thought transference between a chef and his ingredients... Cooking is an ongoing dialogue between chefs, between ingredients and between one moment and the next" (Henderson & Gulliver, 2019, p. 7). How is it possible, then, to include in a cookbook, this cosmic understanding of cooking? The book would seem to have potentially to include, *per impossibile*, everything.

Chapel too hints at this sort of problem: "Can one speak of a crab soup (*soupe d'étrilles*) without taking into consideration the diversity of places and seasons such as, ultimately, those of the reader to whom you're trying to address personally?" (Chapel, 1980, p. 11). It seems impossible to know what you'd need to include, in order to make things clear for the reader of your cookbook. He goes on: "the recipe, as a false teaching of cooking, ignores all the differences of taste and culture." Those differences are important, and it seems a recipe is in danger

<sup>19</sup> See (Balaska, 2016, p. 221-223). One reason Balaska is interested in these experiences of running up against a limit is that they are attempts to express value. This may well be part of what leads Henderson to use the word "intangible".

<sup>20</sup> Again, see (Balaska 2016).

<sup>21</sup> And we are of course in the middle of things. This can actually serve as a way in, which then gives us one reason for writing and publishing such books.

of overlooking them. The words do not change depending upon who is reading them, when, and where.

From Wittgenstein's perspective the observations by Henderson and Chapel make sense, but not because of anything particular to food: rather, it's characteristic of giving aesthetic reasons and what that could involve. He suggests that, "in describing musical taste, you have to describe whether children give concerts, whether women do, or whether men only give them, etc., etc." Notice that he is talking about language use: as are Henderson and Chapel in reflecting on their books, albeit within their books. For we use language in writing a cookbook; we use language in writing or telling someone a recipe. So Wittgenstein's example of a use of language then is "describing musical taste." His suggestion is that we would need to describe a whole host of stuff seemingly at best only tangentially related to, say, the discernment of good music, if we want to get someone to understand musical taste. So the whole culture is potentially relevant,<sup>22</sup> potentially significant—as is the person to whom we're speaking.

And yet, of course, Henderson and Chapel have written cookbooks, just as Wittgenstein gave his lectures. They have committed themselves, with some words. Why? I suggest it's because they ultimately do think there is a point to saying what they're saying, in spite of the difficulties they are also explicitly and implicitly aware of. In the next section I will elucidate what this point is.

##### 5. An "aesthetic attitude" in cookbooks and in Wittgenstein's lectures

One thing established in the previous section is that what Wittgenstein says about making one's way into aesthetic practice is plausible, in virtue of testimony from those engaged in saying things about making one's way into cooking, via a cookbook containing recipes. I have also established that it makes sense to think of what some cookbooks are doing as having an "aesthetic point" that is on a par with other more traditionally-conceived instances of "the aesthetic." That is, these writings mutually reinforce each other. The writing is, at least in part, in the same neighborhood. The consequence for the cookbooks is: it makes sense to

<sup>22</sup> See (LA I, 26) where Wittgenstein talks about the relevance of "the whole culture." I should also mention the compatibility of what I'm saying here with David Finkelstein's discussion of Wittgenstein and rules (Finkelstein 2000). I agree with his overall view about rules coming in particular contexts, situated in lives. I am not really emphasizing "rules" in my discussion here, however, and in any case my interest here is on "aesthetic" aspects of "rule-following." Such aspects would indeed, and of course, be related to the situatedness of the aesthetic practice.

think of how we use cookbooks as involving not just particular ways of preparing dishes, say, but also consideration of why one might prepare them so that what we see, smell, taste, etc. is the way it is. This is perhaps in the end not a terribly surprising conclusion, given even passing acquaintance with the significance people in various cultures give to food. Nevertheless it does serve to establish a location for food and cooking within philosophical aesthetics.

That being said, here I argue there is another shared aesthetic goal in these works. As I indicated in section I, my second overall goal in this paper is to establish that both the cookbooks I'm discussing and Wittgenstein's lectures are cultivating in the reader an attitude whereby they are predisposed to offer aesthetic reasons in discussing significance generally. In this section I draw a significant parallel between Wittgenstein's lectures, as a text, and some cookbooks, as texts. I want to note first that Wittgenstein's text and certain cookbooks are explicitly concerned with how the reader uses them and what the reader does in virtue of reading the writing therein. Not all books may be characterized this way, of course, and it suggests they share a kind of pedagogical aim.

Wittgenstein admits that he is engaged, in the course of his Lectures, in an act of persuasion. "I very often draw your attention to certain differences, e.g. in these classes I tried to show you that infinity is not so mysterious as it looks. What I'm doing is also persuasion. If someone says, 'there is not a difference', and I say: 'there is a difference' I am persuading, I am saying it don't want you to look at it like that,'" (LA III, 35). Wittgenstein is trying to convince us, and his students, to look at things in a certain way. Part of that way of looking is to acknowledge differences between things that seem "the same": the implication is that you could be overlooking something significant. He does not suggest that looking at things another way is *wrong*. But he would like us to look at things in the way he is suggesting. Why then? Putting various strands of what he says together, we can say that he believes we would be in a better position to understand things in future experiences.

Let us take a look at a few examples from cookbooks that are rhetorically similar. i) The prologue to *Joe Beef: Surviving the Apocalypse* asserts that this cookbook is "about how to build things for yourself" (Morin, McMillan, & Erickson, 2018, p. xiii). They go on to acknowledge that they do not necessarily expect people to do the things they discuss in the course of their cookbook. Despite their being discussed in particular recipes, they "don't expect anyone to build a trout pond... or to create your own makeshift cellar to house thirty-one bunker-friendly

foods...” (Morin, McMillan, & Erickson, 2018, p. xiii). But, they say, “maybe you’ll write a poem about the Laurentians.” At this point it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves this is the beginning of a cookbook, and that there are recipes to come. What is going on here?

ii) Returning to St. JOHN, Henderson’s introduction includes a discussion of the term “nose-to-tail.” This is because the restaurant, and apparently Fergus Henderson himself, “have [for some years] been synonymous with the phrase...” (Henderson & Gulliver, 2019, p. 6). (“Nose-to-tail” is the phrase given to describe an approach to cooking that uses the whole animal and thus emphasizes parts normally discarded and deemed “not for food.”) He seems to have mixed emotions about this. On the one hand he is proud, but on the other he is “a little sad when [he] finds [it] misunderstood” and taken as designating “blood and guts” without accompanying awareness of *the point*. And so he laments and urges that instead, “[i]t is a way of being in the world” (Henderson & Gulliver, 2019, p. 6).

And then iii) Richard Olney says something similar: “A menu composed of preparations that are not in themselves French may remain totally French in spirit...” (Olney, 1970, p. 18).<sup>23</sup> When speaking about the point of their approaches to cooking and what guides their recipes, Henderson and Olney get, one might in a non-technical way say, “metaphysical”. I mention this here to introduce the phrase “in spirit” into the discussion. It is perhaps another way to characterize the “thinking about,” and the attention to “the point.” “Way of being in the world” and “spirit” may be useful though in that it gets at the seemingly “intangible” aspect of the discussion.

But Wittgenstein has also given us a way to think about the seemingly intangible. At the end of the third lecture, he spends a moment saying things about what he has been doing in these lectures. “How much I’m doing is changing the style of thinking, and how much I’m doing is persuading people to change their style of thinking” (LA III, 40). That is, Wittgenstein sees himself as working to encourage a kind of attitude, a disposition that they bring to thinking about things. In particular, this attitude is an aesthetic one: it involves attention to the ways things (food, recipes, jackets, paintings, poems etc.) are given to us, while also reflecting on why they might be given to us in these ways. And anything is potentially relevant to this reflection. It therefore necessitates an openness, a

<sup>23</sup> Recall the quote too, from Henderson, about being St. JOHN-ish.

setting-aside of assumptions about what is or is not significant about something and what else may relate to it.

The reason for adopting this attitude is that we *may* come to understand, or we *may* come to appreciate something more. This is, I take it, Batali's idea in discussing all of the details he and his staff have paid attention to, when dining at his restaurant Babbo. The type of napkin may have significance. The music may have significance. Of course he's talking about an experience. But I am suggesting the motivation here is similar: it is about the attitude you bring to preparing recipes in his book, in terms of what you're doing/ the way you're doing it, but also why. He too is encouraging, aiming to persuade the reader or would-be cook to adopt an aesthetic attitude. And if we then see *Joe Beef* and *St. JOHN* as having similar aims, then their talk of going on to "write poetry" and of "ways of being" actually does make sense—even in a cookbook.

Note here that I keep emphasizing that we *may* come to understand something better, or that certain features of something *may* have significance for what that thing is. This is an important aspect of Wittgenstein's perspective, though it's certainly at the very least compatible with what I am highlighting in these cookbooks. We have no reason to think that some aspect of something we're considering *is* in fact significant in advance of considering the thing as it is actually given. For it is of course in the actual employment or use of something, in its rich context, that we can find its meaning.

## 6. The aesthetic attitude and criticism

If we do adopt this kind of aesthetic attitude I described in the previous section, certain types of questions present themselves to us. Why, for instance, might someone prepare dish this in exactly this way? Or why might someone serve this in exactly this way? Or again, why might one write a recipe in a particular cookbook in this particular way? I might indeed then ask further, given that "goal," could this have been prepared, served, or written more effectively?

If these questions sound like prompts for *criticism*, in the sense of the work of a critic, I would say that is entirely appropriate. Arthur Danto's conception of criticism involves saying something about what a thing (a work of art, for him) is, and why it might have the features that it does. How those features are given to us can figure into the meaning of the work.<sup>24</sup> I am suggesting then that the

<sup>24</sup> See e.g., (Danto 2014), "2007 Lecture"; see also (Danto 2002) for a more elaborated, but still streamlined, discussion of criticism as applied to questions about the relevance of beauty.

cultivation of an aesthetic attitude, that both Wittgenstein's Lectures and these cookbooks are encouraging, can also be conceived of as a kind of preparation for engaging in criticism: preparation for talking about aesthetic significance, as one becomes aware of and open to the possibility of being able to say more.

How do we know whether a proposed answer to a question of the sort above is right? How do I know if this *is* something worth my attention?<sup>25</sup> Let me address this by first looking at an example of a rather different sort. I suggest its relevance to my discussion here because it does not involve postulating assumptions about meaning, but instead sketches the form that an aesthetic discussion takes.

In an article essentially about the value of fiction, "Fascinated to Presume: In Defense of Fiction," the writer Zadie Smith spends a good deal of time addressing the notion that fiction writers ought only to write about "what they know," where that means something like "what they know in virtue of who they are and what their personal experiences have enabled them to know." Such a dictum has various corollaries, such as that "the experience of the unlike-us can never be co-opted, ventriloquized, or otherwise 'stolen' by us" (Smith 2019)—even, and especially, in the context of writing fiction. Smith is opposed to this idea, and her article is largely aimed at persuading the reader to agree.

The writer is aiming in her fiction, she proposes, at being *convincing*. She is tempted by the terms "correct," or "true" but she knows that everything in fiction is "by definition not true." So the worst fate for one's writing is that it is "unconvincing," and it may be simply put aside. As a reader, I make this judgment. But how? She elaborates: "there are no fixed rules to regulate this... Each reader will decide. This is the work of an individual consciousness and cannot be delegated to generalized arguments..." (Smith 2019). Indeed, how could there be anything like rules? Where would they be?

This approach is compatible with the way Stanley Cavell discusses experiences with challenging art objects. An art object is, he says, among other things "an object in which human beings will or can take an interest, one which will or can absorb or involve them" (Cavell, 1967, p. 197). Suppose someone were to present us with something quite unlike a painting or a drawing, and yet they claim it to be a work of art. "Could someone be interested and absorbed in a pin, or a crumpled handkerchief?," he asks. If someone does, then Cavell suggests there are two options. "We might dismiss him as mad (or suppose he is pretending), or, alternatively, ask ourselves what he can possibly be seeing in it"

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Melville (2008) operates with what I take to be a compatible notion of criticism.

(Cavell, 1967, p. 197). How this relates to Smith's writer is in this way: suppose I ask myself what he sees in the crumpled handkerchief. I try to make sense of the situation, and I arrive at something plausible. I then explain all this to someone, and this is where I either convince them or I do not. My explanation gets taken up or it does not, just as the writing gets taken up or it does not—and along with it, the explanandum: the recipe, or the artwork. But it's not all "merely rhetoric": my explanation will be most effective when I ground it in the very thing I'm explaining, as concretely as I can.<sup>26</sup>

Suppose I am now in a position of wanting to understand a recipe I am puzzled by, or even food that has been served to me. From an aesthetic perspective, I may then be in the situation of trying to articulate something about the point(s) of doing things in this particular way as opposed to another.<sup>27</sup> If I cannot do so, then perhaps this is because the recipe does not have a guiding aesthetic point, or put another more Wittgensteinian way, it cannot be said to have one. This may matter to me, or it may not—I may care, or I may not—to paraphrase Wittgenstein's point of view at the end of LAI. But I have perhaps learned something about the recipe or the food.<sup>28</sup> Of course, it's also a possibility that it is simply *my fault* that I haven't come up with a satisfactory articulation. Again, as Smith put it, "there are no fixed rules to regulate this process." Note as well that at no point ought we to say the decision is somehow just to be arbitrated by the chef or the writer, for how could we rule out the possibility that they too may be just as mistaken as we may be? What they have to say, however, may be just as helpful as anyone's words. We just might come to see something we had not before.

On one way of looking at things, what Wittgenstein's lectures and these cookbooks are ultimately about is the reader's going on with a sensitivity to, or an attunement to, aesthetic possibilities. I call this goal a kind of "aesthetic preparation."<sup>29</sup> We look at, say, paintings, dining tables, recipes, or plates of food with a certain disposition. Viewed in this way the discussions in Wittgenstein about reading poetry, or about "cultural deterioration"—or a salad

<sup>26</sup> It seems to me that Juliet Floyd (2018) is addressing some of these same points, though my approach here is from a different angle (based in a modified simile). See for example, her discussions of "aspect" and "characterization" (pp. 361-362; p. 364; p. 371) and her repeated point that "possibilities, characters, aspects, can be and are discovered" (p. 385); they are "out there". Cavell might emphasize the possibility of error more than she does.

<sup>27</sup> Again, this fits with Floyd's (2018) use of "characterization" and her emphasis on specificity.

<sup>28</sup> See also (Cavell 1958), where he suggests that Wittgenstein's work offers us "new categories of criticism" (p. 61).

<sup>29</sup> See (Fox 2017), which is a review of (Greve & Macha 2016).

recipe in the St. JOHN book—are not themselves the point. We might instead say that they are being used as part of a training. (At the same time—of course!—if I want to make a salad, or boeuf bourgignon, consulting a recipe *is* obviously an effective way to accomplish that.)

The aesthetic attitude renders us open to potential significance, and thus, to something potentially to be valued. The way Wittgenstein gets at this is by highlighting that there may be more to say. Cavell approaches this somewhat differently and suggests that part of what we deliberate about is sorting through the aesthetic possibilities are “how this is to be seen...” and “how could a man be inspired to do *this*” (Cavell, 1967, p. 203) This is to say, Cavell suggests that in making sense of what we read or what’s before us, we are in effect trying to see how someone might care about it. But this is just a way of saying that we are trying to see how it could be that they value it. As Wittgenstein and Chapel highlight, this value may come from or be traceable to anything, anywhere. One could go on in various ways on the basis of this attitude. You might want to write a poem, or to cook, or indeed just to talk about things more.

To sum up this section and the preceding one then: When I say that cookbooks, as instances of recipe-uses, potentially have “aesthetic value,” then, one thing this means is that we may potentially care not just what the recipes within it are, but why they’re given to us in the particular ways they are. There may be a point, guiding idea(s) underlying why these recipes are written in the ways they are. And one may find this valuable, or not. But further, as writing, I am also claiming these books *do* have a particular kind of aesthetic value, in that they have a kind of aesthetic training as an overarching goal. In varying degrees, this goal of training informs the form of the writing in the books.<sup>30</sup>

## 7. Making sense of the salad recipe

Let me now conclude by returning to the discussion with which I began, about The Claw and putting salad on the plate (Henderson & Gulliver, 2019, p. 96). How might we make sense of this passage, bearing in mind that it’s given to the reader in the particular context it is?

One possibility is this:<sup>31</sup> I would first observe that the tone of the passage is distinctive. In fact, this is consistent with the tone of the entire cookbook. I might describe it as somewhat casual and conversational while also being playfully

<sup>30</sup> That is, the aesthetic point is: cultivating attunement to the possibility of aesthetic points.

<sup>31</sup> I do not mean to exclude other ways of making sense of the passage, of course.

serious. Playful seriousness could indicate a disregard for being serious about the matter at hand, mocking those who are serious about something like dressing a salad. However in this case, since the writing displays this characteristic time and again, I think the effect is actually the opposite. It serves actually to reinforce the seriousness, albeit self-consciously. So, my suggestion is that the tone is something like: “Yes, here is an entire page on dressing a salad. But—as ridiculous as this sounds—you want to do this properly, don’t you? It’ll be worth it.” And so one must then “learn to master the claw.” Hold your hand as “a puma poised to take a swipe.” Et cetera. You should end up with the “perfect organic heap upon the plate.” “Do not touch again” is italicized. Et cetera.

I will further suggest that the writing and these particular instructions serve a common purpose. The salad is meant to look perfect on the plate and “organic,” which is to say, “natural.” Its appearance then belies the amount of thought they are suggesting ought to go into the seemingly simple act of dressing lettuce and putting it on a plate. That may well be the point: if one can usefully—though that’s the question, isn’t it?—spend all this time addressing putting a salad on a plate, is there anything that one could exempt from such attention?

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