

Spoerri's Keftedes: Material Transformation as a Social Binding Agent

Monika Wagner

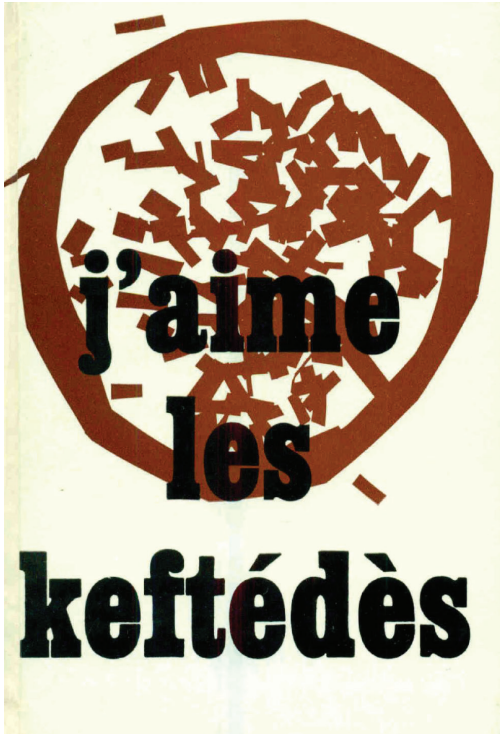
On the tiny Greek island of Symi, where Daniel Spoerri and his girlfriend Jacqueline “Kichka” Baticheff spent more than a year, from 1966 to 1967, he kept a “Gastronomical Diary” for two months in which he noted all they he consumed. In addition, he wrote what he called a “Dissertation sur le ou la Keftédès ou réflexions sur le prémâché ou comment parler boulettes et non art avec une excursion imprévue sur le sang” (Dissertation on keftedes or reflections on the premasticated or how to talk about meatballs and not art with an unforeseen excursion into blood). The latter text, which Spoerri published in his self-made journal *Le Petit Colosse de Symi*, explains at some length the preparation of minced meat—the main ingredient of keftedes, the Greek national dish. In a letter to a friend, Swiss artist Karl Gerstner, Spoerri called the text a “manuscript on minced-meat balls with annotations about poverty and civilization.”¹ Despite many scholarly footnotes within his “Dissertation,” Spoerri made fun of the academic title and assured his readers that there was no risk of him becoming a doctor of keftedes.² By 1970, he declared his love for keftedes once again, this time illustrating them visually (fig.1) in his joint publication with Robert Morel: *J’aime les keftédès*.³

In the following, I will examine Daniel Spoerri’s interest in Greek keftedes and its many international variants. The artist’s ironic self-presentation as an ethnographer who explores the unifying transformations of heterogeneous foodstuffs by cooking, mincing, or chewing will be considered in relation to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s oppositional categories of “The Raw and the Cooked.” Moreover, I will show how the transformations of food into conglomerates like keftedes fit in with contemporary art theories of anti-form and arte povera

1 Daniel Spoerri, *Anekdoten zu einer Topographie des Zufalls*, Hamburg, 1998, p. 115.

2 Daniel Spoerri, *Gastronomisches Tagebuch: Itinerarium für zwei Personen auf einer ägäischen Insel nebst einer Abhandlung über den oder die Keftedes* [first published in French in 1968], Hamburg, 1995, p. 135. All translations by the author from the German edition.

3 Daniel Spoerri and Robert Morel, *J’aime les kéftèdes*, Les Hautes Plaines, 1970.



1 Daniel Spoerri, *J'aime les keftédès*
(*I love keftédès*), 1970

interventions. Finally, I will discuss Spoerri's collection of recipes for keftedes and similar mixtures as a symbol for social commitment and communication.

"The Raw and the Cooked"

On Symi, Spoerri became interested in the potential of mincing and mixing foodstuffs and began to collect recipes for minced meat dishes from different countries: besides the Greek keftedes, he mentions köfta, dolmades, knaidlach, hamburgers, boulettes, Frikadellen, and many others (fig.2). He compares the shredding of meat in various cultures and even includes vegetarian mixtures in his collection of recipes. Equating all the variants of mashed stuff used for keftedes with the "pre-masticated," he asks why things that are already edible should be cooked and re-cooked. Spoerri sums up his considerations in "Dissertation" with the remark that the civilized and the cooked belong together.

He was well aware that this remark referred to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French ethnologist who had entitled the first volume of his *Mythologies* "The Raw and the Cooked," published three years before, in 1964.⁴ Analyzing myths of the indigenous peoples of South America, Lévi-Strauss emphasized the use of fire in the preparation of food as a transformation of nature into culture and thus as a fundamental landmark in the development of mankind. In his diary, Spoerri declared that he had never had the opportunity to read Lévi-Strauss's book since he had given it to a "self-styled sociologist."⁵ Be that as it may, he explicitly referred to the implications of the book several times, mostly in a playful and witty manner. Quoting a friend, Spoerri for example ironically characterized his girlfriend Kichka (whose grandfather had crossed the

4 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologies I* [first published in French 1964], Chicago, 1983.

5 Spoerri, 1995 (note 2), p. 137.

Caspian Sea to immigrate to France) as a “semi-feral of Caucasian origin”⁶ because she preferred bloody steaks and half-cooked meat. Conversely, he maintained that big cities have even civilized animals. In Paris, he notes, some cats no longer appreciate raw meat, whereas in the wilderness of Symi, they do not even recognize cooked meat as food.⁷ In his considerations, Spoerri modified the opposition between the wild and the civilized by introducing keftedes—the minced, ground, or “pre-masticated”—as a hybrid category. A multi-variant blending of different components, the keftedes may integrate raw as well as cooked ingredients. Elsewhere, Spoerri retells an anecdote about “instant keftedes” recounted by an unnamed missionary, which he claims to have read in a book. Spoerri considers the story so disgusting that he can't forget it. According to the tale, a missionary was invited by a chief in Indonesia or some other so-called far-away place, where the chief's favorite wife or daughter had to chew the meat to make it tender before spitting it directly into the poor missionary's mouth.⁸ With this story, Spoerri presents the pre-masticated as analogous to keftedes – as a hybrid of the raw and the cooked – by pointing out that chewing transforms both the raw and the cooked foodstuffs into a homogeneous pap similar to the consistency of the keftedes. Half in earnest, half in jest, Spoerri refers to “Mister Lévi-Strauss” and suggests that the author might have even considered the pre-masticated as a third category.

The transformation of the raw into something digestible is of more vital interest in environments where people go fishing and grow their own vegetables than it is in a big city, where various stages of prepared and precooked food are available in the supermarket. On Symi, Spoerri found himself—like an ethnographer—as a participating fieldworker, exploring food, cooking, and eating. Lévi-Strauss's oppositional categories of the raw and the cooked obviously provoked him to add one more from his own experience.

Und nun, eingeführt, und zwar nicht als Schmuggelware, das Rezept des Keftedes aus Smyrna:

200 g Zucchini, 200 g in Salzwasser nicht zu gar gekochte, abgetropfte und gepresste Auberginen
 200 g feingehackte Zwiebeln
 200 g gehacktes Hammelfleisch
 100 g geriebener Käse,
 und da man diese Bouletten ja nicht nur in Smyrna machen kann, nehmen wir am besten »iri«, das Geschenk eines befreundeten »pastora«, einen Frischkäse aus Ziegenmilch, den man mehrere Monate in ziemlich stark gesalzenes Wasser legt, bis das spitze oder das stumpfe Ende an die Oberfläche steigt.
 Zwei geschlagene Eier hinzufügen,
 das Ganze gut vermengen wie bei jedem Keftedes,
 in Mehl wälzen
 und in einer Smyrna-Öl-Friture (anstelle von Symi-Öl) braten.
 In Paris habe ich die Zucchini einmal durch Avocados ersetzt. Es war nicht besser und nicht schlechter.²⁰

2 One of the recipes for keftédès (1967)

6 Ibid., p. 95.

7 Ibid., p. 151.

8 Ibid., p. 136.



3 Daniel Spoerri, *Wenn alle Künste untergehn*, Assemblage, 1969, private coll. Milan

Eat Art

Before retreating to Symi, Spoerri had organized Eat Art events at galleries in several European cities for a number of years but decided he needed to gain a better understanding of the preparation of food and its prerequisites and conditions. The comparatively unattractive island of Symi, which Spoerri declared the poorest in the Mediterranean region, is located only seven kilometers, about four and a half miles, from the Turkish border. This borderland between East and West seemed like the perfect location in which to focus on the kitchen as a blender and transformer. On the multicultural island,⁹ the constant exchange and even smuggling of foodstuffs between Symi and Turkey was as intense as the exchange of meals and dishes of Oriental and Western origin.

In Western thought, both the cook and the artist are highly esteemed for their creativity. In calling the cook and the artist “*êtres divins*” (divine beings), Voltaire, for example, emphasized the similarity of their creative powers.¹⁰ In the past, famous artists had designed food not only for the banquet tables of rulers but for their own fame as well. In 1971, an exhibition of Spoerri’s work entitled “*Wenn alle Künste untergehn, die edle Kochkunst bleibt bestehen*” (When all the arts perish, the noble art of cooking will survive) (fig.3) was held in Amsterdam. In the exhibition catalog—which Spoerri dedicated to his father, Isaac Feinstein, who was murdered by the National Socialists—he tied his Eat Art ambitions to a dignified history.¹¹ Giorgio Vasari, among

⁹ Symi had been part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years until its occupation by Italy from 1912 to 1943.

¹⁰ Voltaire quoted in Bernd Michael Andressen, *Barocke Tafelfreuden an Europas Höfen*, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 55.

¹¹ *Wenn alle Künste untergehn, die edle Kochkunst bleibt bestehen*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1971.

others, is extensively quoted; the so-called father of art history acknowledged a group of Florentine artists, among them Andrea del Sarto, for their elaborate artworks made of foodstuffs.¹² They were specially created for the artists' monthly meetings accompanied by shared meals.¹³ Thus, the Florentine artists probably physically incorporated their artworks, thereby destroying them by eating and digesting them. In a press release about the Amsterdam exhibition referring to Eat Art's noble ancestors, Spoerri pointed out that his recently opened restaurant in Düsseldorf was intended as a "forum" for artistic exchange.¹⁴ Thus, in taking his work from the studio into the kitchen,¹⁵ as had other contemporary artists such as Dieter Roth, Spoerri found himself in excellent company.

Importantly, Spoerri's "Dissertation" revolves around the process of deforming, amalgamating, and reshaping by cutting and mashing with various instruments. Cutting and cooking converts the individually shaped natural foodstuffs—their fibrous or tough, firm or grainy textures—into a more or less homogenous, informal mash. Spoerri meticulously explains several methods of cutting and mincing meat and finally considers the meat grinder. But he also discusses more fundamental and archaic ways of mincing. Like Elias Canetti—who, in his major work *Crowds and Power* from 1960, characterizes human teeth as "the armed guardians of the mouth" and that "whatever goes in [the mouth] is lost"¹⁶—Spoerri extensively considered the specificity of corporal 'tools' that create, digest, and expel the pre-masticated.

Food and other formless materials

In contemporary art, formlessness and the abject were highly topical during the 1960s.¹⁷ Besides other everyday materials such as earth, trash, or plastics, foodstuffs became a widespread material for artistic production. They were of interest because of their ephemerality, their varying states, and the instability

12 Monika Wagner, "Vom Umschmelzen: Plastische Materialien in Kunst und Küche", in Beate Söntgen and Theodor Vischer (eds.), *Über Dieter Roth: Beiträge des Symposiums vom 4. Und 5. Juli 2003*, Basel, 2004, pp. 121-135.

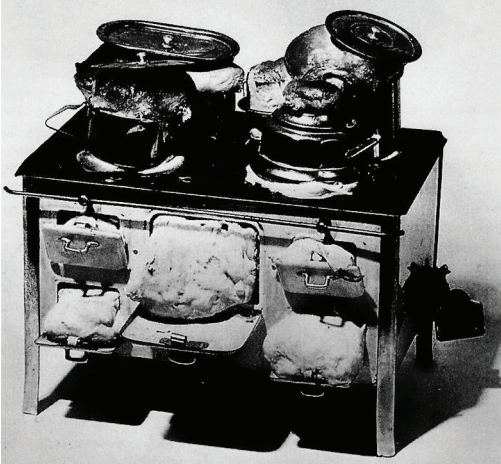
13 Wolf-Dietrich Löhr, "Spielformen der Kunst: Andrea del Sarto als Architekt und der Triumph der Würste", in Hannah Baader et al. (eds.), *Im Agon der Künste: Paragonales Denken, ästhetische Praxis und die Diversität der Sinne*, Munich, 2007, pp. 143-168.

14 Andressen, 1996 (note 10), p. 24.

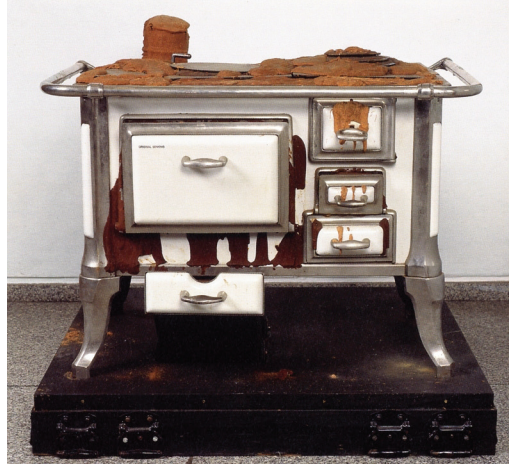
15 Petra Lange-Berndt, "Die Aufkündigung des Ateliers bei Caroline Schneemann und Annette Messager", in Michael Diers and Monika Wagner (eds.), *Das Atelier als Topos und Wissensform*, Berlin, 2010, pp. 75-91.

16 Elias Canetti: *Crowds and Power* [first published in German in 1960], trans. Carol Stewart, New York, 1962, p. 209.

17 See Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi*, exh. cat., Paris, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1996.



4 Daniel Spoerri, *Hommage à Dieter Roth*, 1969, location unknown



5 Dieter Roth, *Stove*, 1969, Coll. Onnasch, Berlin

of their forms. Shaping and reshaping them is the authentic work of the cook.¹⁸ A little bit of heat alters the consistency of the materials, while chemical and physical interactions with other materials change their appearances, textures, and color. Due in part to their availability, foodstuffs became attractive to artists at a time when Georges Bataille’s term “l’informe,” from his 1929 *Dictionnaire critique*, was revitalized as an experimental artistic category in Europe and became famous as “anti-form” in the United States.¹⁹ In his 1989 “Hommage à Dieter Roth”—dedicated to his close friend Roth, a well-known food artist—Spoerri explored the agency of foodstuffs (fig. 4). In his kitchen, Roth was constantly dissolving and melting sugar and chocolate, leaving the result to solidify into random shapes. Spoerri referred to Roth’s “stove”—an old-fashioned kitchen stove (fig. 5)—as the heart of the transformation processes. While Dieter Roth demonstrated thermodynamics with a stove overflowing with melted chocolate, Spoerri worked with rising dough.²⁰ In Spoerri’s “Hommage à Dieter Roth,” the expanding dough oozes from the doors and cracks of a doll’s stove, the pot and kettle on top almost bursting. In both works, the transforming energy of the oven’s heat is central to the creation of new, contingent forms. In comparison with Roth and his liquefaction of chocolate, Spoerri goes a step

18 Ralf Beil, *Künstlerküche: Lebensmittel als Kunstmaterial—von Schiele bis Jason Rhoades*, Cologne, 2002, p. 8.

19 Robert Morris, “Anti Form”, in *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 41-46.

20 Spoerri was interested in dough as a material “which cannot be precisely formed but has to be left to chance.” Spoerri quoted in Heidi E. Violand-Hobi, *Daniel Spoerri: Biographie und Werk*, Munich/London/New York, 1998, p. 60.

further and emphasizes the dynamic nature of cooking demonstrated by the chemical reactions involved in rising dough.

It was in the context of the deformation and transformation of 'poor' materials, in which chaos and decay are inscribed, that Spoerri's interest in keftedes, which he called agglomerations, was aroused. As the artist noted in his "Dissertation," making them requires

"work, waiting time, mixing, blending, balancing the ingredients, the spices, and it requires repeated cooking: the keftedes are the declaration of war by the poor on poverty, the refusal to eat the leftovers unrefined just for being hungry. They are the poor man's way of being rich."²¹

The value of keftedes lies in the fact that they are a manifestation of the high art of integrating the marginal to generate something new. When Roland Barthes declared the agglomeration "the fundamental form of repugnance"²² in his 1982 essay on Bernard Réquichot, a French painter active in the 1950s, he used the blending of food as a metaphor for Réquichot's extremely rich impasto painting: what is cleanly separated by culture, is blended into a mixture of desire and repugnance. By stressing the anti-academic handling, the physical color paste of the pictures is described as an "glutinous, alimentary paste, luxuriant and nauseating, where outlining, cutting-out – i.e. the nomination – are done away with"²³ Barthes's dramatic description of Réquichot's innovations in painting intends to arouse disgust at the impure and the mixed.²⁴ Instead of the raw and the cooked, form and formlessness are confronted. In painting, the materiality of color had, for a long time, been suspected to facilitate formlessness. As a cook working in a kitchen, Spoerri was instead looking for names of and differentiations between formless amalgams of foodstuffs—of *Lebensmittel* (a German term, which literally translates as "means for life," the basic stuff of survival).

Food in pop art

Not all artists who worked with foodstuffs were fond of cooking or interested in the material transformations that take place in the kitchen. Many American

²¹ Spoerri, 1995 (note 2), p. 172.

²² Roland Barthes: "Réquichot and his body", in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard, Berkley, 2003, p. 211.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For more on delight and disgust in the iconography of eating and drinking, see Ursula Peters, "Genuss und Ekel", in Ursula Peters and Georg F. Schwarzbauer (eds.), *Vom Essen und Trinken: Darstellungen in der Kunst der Gegenwart*, exh. cat., Wuppertal, Kunst- und Museumsverein Wuppertal, 1987, pp. 29–49.



6 Stanley Kubrick, from 2001:
A Space Odyssey, 1968

pop artists were instead concerned with commodities like prefabricated food in its colorful and shiny wrappings. Andy Warhol's famous *Campbell's Tomato Soup Cans* or *Brillo Boxes* are just the tip of the iceberg. In the New York Bianchini Gallery, which, in October 1964, was transformed into "The American Supermarket," all the artistic foodstuffs exhibited were perfectly clean, canned, sealed in plastic, or bottled. Regarding food in the United States of the 1960s, there was little relation between packaging and content, exchange-value and use-value. As Margaret Visser puts it, supermarkets were the "expression and the symbol... of North American civilization" and the driving force behind its desire for highly esteemed values, such as variety, abundance, and cleanliness.²⁵ Above all, commodity aesthetics in the food industry proclaimed absolute equality; this is exactly what Warhol intended to top using a strategy of "double affirmation."²⁶

In the 1970s, he even planned to open a chain of restaurants in New York named "ANDY-MATS - The Restaurant for the Lonely Person." The idea was to create a place where a person could have a meal in a public place without any human contact.

Diners would collect their meals from an automat, and, as Warhol explained, "then you take your tray into a booth and watch television."²⁷ Warhol might have been influenced by Stanley Kubrick's famous film "2001: A Space Odyssey," distributed in 1968. In the space ship, each astronaut eats alone from a tray with neatly separated compartments filled with differently colored stodge.²⁸

25 Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner*, New York, 1986, p. 22.

26 Bazon Brock calls Warhol's pop strategy a "double affirmation" in the sense of Theodor W. Adorno; see Bazon Brock, "Ästhetik in der Alltagswelt und Emanzipation der Wünsche", in Marie Luise Syring (ed.), *Um 1968: konkrete Utopien in Kunst und Gesellschaft*, exh. cat., Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, Cologne, 1990, p. 183.

27 Andy Warhol quoted in Elisabeth Hartung, "Food, Art and Communication: Food as a New Model of Art Reception", in *To Eat or not to Eat: Or Relationships of Art with Food in the 20th Century*, exh. cat., Salamanca, Centro de Arte de Salamanca, 2002, p. 78.

28 Michele Dantini, "The Mutant's Food: Design and Science Fiction", in Germano Celant (ed.), *Arts and Foods: Rituals since 1851*, exh. cat., Milan, Triennale di Milano, 2015, p. 627.

While eating, each astronaut is completely absorbed in the pictures on his ultra-flat portable television communicating with the home planet (fig.6). The reduction of the sensual process of eating to an act of ingestion is exactly what Warhol had in mind with his *Restaurant for the Lonely Person*. The physical and latently dirty interaction with food is minimized in favor of a clean visual absorption or rather virtual interaction with a television program.

The gap between Warhol's and Spoerri's interests in food and meals could not be wider. Unlike American pop artists, artists in Europe, where supermarkets were not yet prevalent, were generally less focused on depicting foodstuffs as clean commodities. Rather, they regarded food in connection with either the transformative process of cooking or with the voluptuousness of consumption.

Eating as a social performance

Above all, Spoerri has staged meals as communicative situations that correspond with local conditions; on the island of Symi, this implied adapting to a rather specific assortment of foods. It seems that this was in keeping with the so-called *Mediterranéé*—a counter concept to industrialization and alienation. The contemporary European *arte povera* movement supported similar principles. Greek and Italian proponents of this Mediterranean down-to-earth movement favored simple local materials, performances, and interactions with the local people.

On the island of Symi, where keftedes were presented as a gastronomical highlight, eating was experienced as a genuine social event in everyday culture. The physiological necessity of eating served as a basis for activities and patterns of local order. In his essay on the sociology of meals from 1910, Georg Simmel, a German philosopher and sociologist, reflects on the relationship between eating as the ultimate egoistic process and eating as a form of social interaction:

“what I think, I can let others know; what I see, I can let them see; what I say, hundreds can hear—but what the individual eats no one else can eat under any circumstances. In none of the higher areas is this the case, that which one person has, the other must renounce.”²⁹

²⁹ Georg Simmel, “Soziologie der Mahlzeit”, in *Individualismus der modernen Zeit* [1910], Frankfurt am Main, 2008, pp. 95–102 [author's trans.], Michael Symons, “Simmel's Gastronomical Sociology: An Overlooked Essay”, in *Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of Human Nourishment*, 5/4, 1994, pp. 333–351, here p. 346, URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233454141_Simmel's_gastronomic_sociology_An_overlooked_essay [accessed: 05.06.2020]. Symons provides a translation of Simmel's essay in the appendix of this article.

Simmel characterizes eating as the most primitive physiological necessity for survival, common to all creatures. He continues by suggesting that this is precisely why, in all cultures—as different as they may be—the egoistic act of consumption has been transformed into social rituals.

These rituals are performed on different levels ranging from everyday family meals to stately banquets³⁰. Eating together is a means of creating as well as a manifestation of symbolic relationships. Years later, Spoerri marked both his appointment as professor at the Werkkunstschule in Cologne in 1978 and his retirement from the school in 1983 with impressive banquets for students, colleagues, and friends. To share a meal around the same table is a sign of connection and hospitality. On a political level, it has been understood as an important instrument of diplomacy and peacemaking.³¹ In the biblical understanding, the *ultima cena* is a significant means of manifesting community in the Christian faith. In contrast to a shared table or shared meal, as traditional practices and symbols of social connection, cutting a tablecloth signifies hostility.

Exchanges of foodstuffs

On the island of Symi, not only meals but foodstuffs in general were highly relevant agents of networking and friendship. In his diary, Spoerri noted that passing an open door at certain times of the day meant one would be invited to share a meal. Such great hospitality among ordinary people in remote places, where restaurants are rare, is a necessity that creates social ties. The strengthening of social ties is associated not only with the meals themselves but with the raw materials as well. Many of Spoerri's observations refer to social relationships expressed through the exchange of foodstuffs and sharing of meals. Therefore, knowing who dined with whom, who was invited by whom, and who joined Spoerri and Kichka for dinner is significant. Marcel Mauss, the famous French ethnologist and sociologist, argued that exchange in archaic societies was considered a gift.³² In the more or less agricultural society of Symi, exchange had a double structure—both a pre-capitalistic as well as

30 Gerhard Neumann, "Les tableaux-pièges de Daniel Spoerri entre art et ethnographie", in *Hermès, La Revue* 43/3, 2005, pp. 141–155.

31 Hans Ottomeyer, foreword to *Die öffentliche Tafel: Tafelzeremoniell in Europa 1300–1900*, Hans Ottomeyer and Michaela Völkel (eds.), exh. cat., Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 2002, URL: https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/oeffentliche_tafel/kvorwort.htm [accessed: 05.06.2020]. To mark the beginning and end of his five-year tenure as a teacher at the University of Applied Arts and Design in Cologne in 1983, Spoerri organized spectacular banquet meals: the "Hommage à Karl Marx" on 14 April 1978 and "Das längliche Essen" or "Bankett für Imbezile und Germannen" on 8 February 1983. These banquets referred to the ritualistic meals that, in former times, marked the inauguration of monarchs or special events during their reign.

32 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* [first published in French in 1950], London, 2002.

- 7 'An evening like every evening',
Spoerri and Kichka in Spoerri's
Restaurant, Düsseldorf 1968



a capitalistic one. This becomes evident in Spoerri's description of how to acquire rare products such as oysters: you go to the fisherman and share a bottle of ouzo with him so that you may buy oysters tomorrow. You donate something in order to be allowed to buy something.

On Symi, the exchange of raw ingredients such as plants, fruits, and fish was, of course, virtually a necessity. On an island with a limited supply of foodstuffs and a strong dependence on seasonal, local products, the couple inevitably became part of a lively exchange of foodstuffs: freshly picked fruits, fresh fish, and sweet herbs. The whole village seemed to live in a dense network of food-relations and food-exchanges that indicated and created social connections as well as responsibilities and commitments. The "gift economy," to borrow Marcel Mauss's expression, was ubiquitous. For example, when Kichka's mother, who lived in Nantes, visited her daughter and Spoerri on Symi, friends and neighbors came bearing all sorts of freshly harvested goods: purslane, three lemons, preserved bitter oranges, and a pot of basil. Wisely, Spoerri had instructed Ms. Baticheff to bring small gifts from France as counter-gifts. The visits encouraged the artist to reflect on foodstuffs as a gift in different social contexts. Thus, while it may have seemed ridiculous to present three plain lemons or some tomatoes as a gift in Paris or any other prestigious city of the Western world, in the countryside (like Symi), it was considered absolutely appropriate to share what had grown in one's garden. Plants, which take time to grow, are the result of an interaction with the donor. Offering them as a gift in exchange for a meal feeds the social network. The quality of the fruit or other foodstuff elevates the status of the donor and is an expression of the care he or she invested in their cultivation. Spoerri proudly emphasized the outstanding quality of the eggs produced by their chickens on Symi. He considered their taste to be the result of the smart way the hens were

fed, not only with the usual poultry feed but with grains, fresh herbs, vine leaves, snails, and above all rice with fish, which was actually intended for the cats.³³ Thus the eggs were somehow rendered unique and improved by the food the hens received from their owners. These particular products were exchanged, shared, and circulated among people with whom they were acquainted to varying degrees.

Finally, all the differently processed and exchanged materials ended up in the national dish, which proved to be an international manifestation of poor men's riches. Spoerri considered the *keftedes* hybrids in a double sense: he aligned the physical materiality of their composition with the ethnic mix typical of Symi—the border island between East and West. On a global scale, the mixtures signified the United States, with their “immense amalgamation of peoples,” and a cuisine Spoerri called a “cud of the world's regional cuisines,” – the burger being the American equivalent of *keftedes*.³⁴

Obviously, Spoerri's interest in minced materials, their mixing and blending as a social and cultural production of hybrids, was fostered by his own biographical background. The *keftedes* thus became a physical metaphor for Spoerri's lifelong artistic project of bringing not only different materials but also different people together (fig. 7).

During the 1960s, when alternative cultural efforts turned away from big cities and the progress paradigm, when formlessness and mixture became a countermodel to representational art forms, everyday materials such as foodstuffs and practices such as cooking became relevant artistic manifestations. Reflecting on Spoerri's “Dissertation”—a product of his way of life on Symi—with the aid of French ethnographical positions allows us to take into account both the specific genesis and the social impact of Spoerri's new art form.

³³ Spoerri, 1995 (note 2), p. 102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.