

# Experimental Eating



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# Vivian Ostrovsky

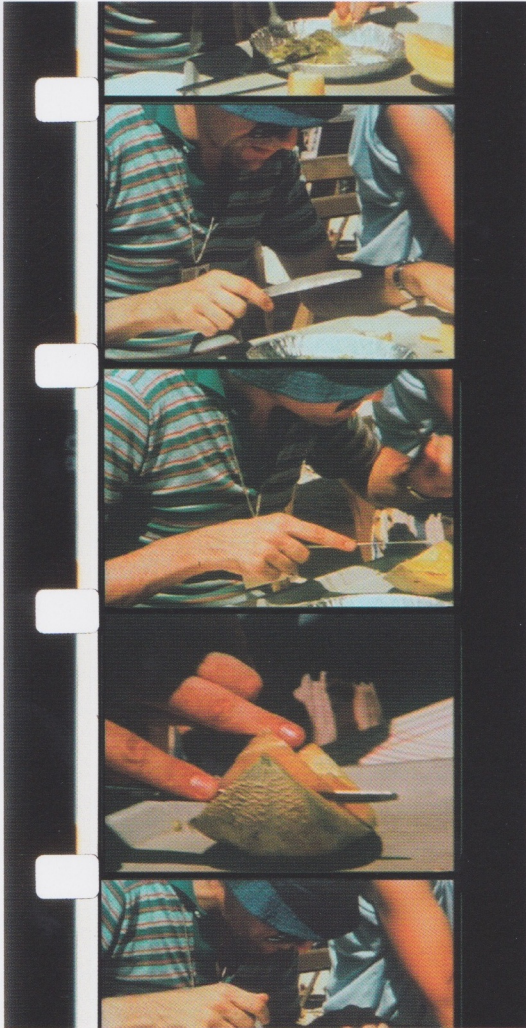


Vivian Ostrovsky's 1988 film *EAT* is—according to the artist herself—“a playful collage of humans' and animals' table manners as they gulp down breakfasts, lunches and dinners in a variety of situations”,<sup>1</sup> calling into question the truism that “animals ‘feed’ and humans ‘eat’”.<sup>2</sup> “The first thing I learned” Ostrovsky recalled, “was that people hate being filmed whilst eating. Animals don't seem to mind as much.”<sup>3</sup> Aiming to be as unobtrusive as possible, Ostrovsky filmed people at large gatherings using a small Super 8 camera while visiting open-air festivals, agricultural salons, restaurants with terraces and, of course, a few zoos.

Ostrovsky gathered the documentary material for *EAT* whilst travelling through Paris, Berlin, Barcelona and Vaison-la-Romaine in Provence. Born in New York before growing up in Rio and studying in France, Ostrovsky is habitually nomadic, touring Europe during the early 1970s promoting, distributing and exhibiting films by women artists through festivals and symposiums. She began making her own work in the 1980s and became known for her mosaic-like documentary films that incorporate found footage into her own. Mostly shot in Super 8 and blown up to 16mm film, Ostrovsky's films are voyeuristic diaries and travelogues. Through a process of collating, collage and editing, Ostrovsky documents the everyday with humour and whimsy.

Several of Ostrovsky's films deal with food and eating through travel. A personal film diary of many family visits to Moscow, *Nikita Kino*, 2002, is an album of picnics, markets and days out with food. Taking the role of observer in *\*\*\*(Trois Etoiles)*, 1987, Ostrovsky follows two Californians as they eat their way through a tour of France, testing the Michelin

DINNER



guide's recommendations for three star restaurants. "I love observing kitchen preparations", Ostrovsky says of her fascination with food, "people consumed by what they feed on": an astute observation in an era of food blogs, online recipe sharing, touring TV chefs and televised cooking competitions.

A dedicated cinephile, Ostrovsky's recommended menu of food films would include Syberberg's *Ludwig's Cook*, a biography of Ludwig II of Bavaria seen through the eyes of his cook, Chaplin's *Modern Times* with its eating machine invention, and Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen*, the tense story of a family gathering.<sup>4</sup>

① Author's interview with artist, July 2014. ② cmzimmerman.blogspot.co.uk. ③ ④ Author's interview with artist, July 2014. Ⓢ Ⓢ *EAT*, 1988, film stills. Courtesy the artist.



*Experimental Eating* is an essential survey of contemporary food-based creative practice across art, design, science and socio-political community interaction from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The book—split thematically into chapters entitled “Origins”, “Preparation”, “Dinner” and “Leftovers”—features profiles of over 50 individuals and groups working across this creative spectrum, pushing the boundaries of how we understand, experience and relate to food and the rituals of dining; from the irreverent sculptural work of Erwin Wurm and Janine Antoni to the ickily provocative food science of Adam Zaretsky and the Tissue Culture and Art Project, via Bompas & Parr and SWAMP’s interactive, irreverent happenings, the putrid socio-global commentary of Klaus Pichler and Karl Heinz Jeron, and many more.

The profiles are preceded with a new introductory essay by the Center For Genomic Gastronomy (Zack Denfeld, Cathrine Kramer and Emma Conley), exploring the work of the practitioners therein and positing new starting points for observing the ever-changing status of contemporary food practice as a conduit for multidisciplinary expression and experience.

A concise appendix includes reprinted texts on early avant-foodists the Futurists; a potted history of early twentieth-century practices by EIDIA’s Paul Lamarre and Melissa Wolf; and Claude Lévi-Strauss’ seminal essay on the semantic field of cookery, “The Culinary Triangle”.

Aesthetically striking and contextually wide-reaching, *Experimental Eating* is a fascinating entry into a progressive and under-documented field.

BOMPAS & PARR  
CONDIMENT JUNKIE  
ERWIN WURM  
GERCO DE RUIJTER  
JAMES KING  
JENNIFER RUBELL  
CONFLICT KITCHEN  
WAAG SOCIETY  
LARISSA SANSOUR  
MARIJE VOGELZANG  
MARTHA ROSLER

PUTPUT  
ADAM ZARETSKY  
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