

Eat Art Work

Olafur Eliasson

Studio Olafur Eliasson, Rungestrasse, Berlin, 1998–2002



Cooking is caring for others. It is a gesture of generosity and hospitality that functions as social glue; it amplifies social relations and translates thoughts into food, into giving and sharing. When we cook, we both use the world and produce it at the same time. And through eating, we take in the world, bringing light into our bodies. Take a piece of lettuce – it is essentially stored sunlight. Since the lettuce could not have grown without being exposed to the sun, you could say that it acts like a solar cell. By eating, we take in this energy.

The Kitchen celebrates the connections between human beings, food, and the sun as a system of energy exchange, as an ecology of giving and taking, of sharing. It examines food through various lenses, from the microscopic to the macroscopic.

I find it fascinating to do a book about something that everyone knows. Food is fundamental to human life. Eating is like breathing; we all do it to stay alive. To eat is to have an experience literally on the inside, and our knowledge of hunger and of food in our stomachs is, more than anything, a *felt knowledge*. Our experiences are embodied, ingrained in everyday life. This topic of embodiment has long been at the center of my artistic practice.

I like to think of my studio as a "reality-producing machine." Through the production of art, the studio has a direct effect on the city of Berlin, where it is located, and on the world beyond. It coproduces a slice of the times we live in, the values – political, ethical, and aesthetic – that influence our thoughts and actions.

The different parts of my studio are intertwined: the architects and designers develop installations and larger-scale built structures; the communications and publications team collects and disseminates information and ideas; the wood and metal workshops, painters, and skilled craftsmen test and produce, hands-on, the various artworks; and the office management and finance teams make sure the studio runs seamlessly, practically, and economically. One team influences the decisions of the others; one project feeds the next – the feeling of interdependence is key.

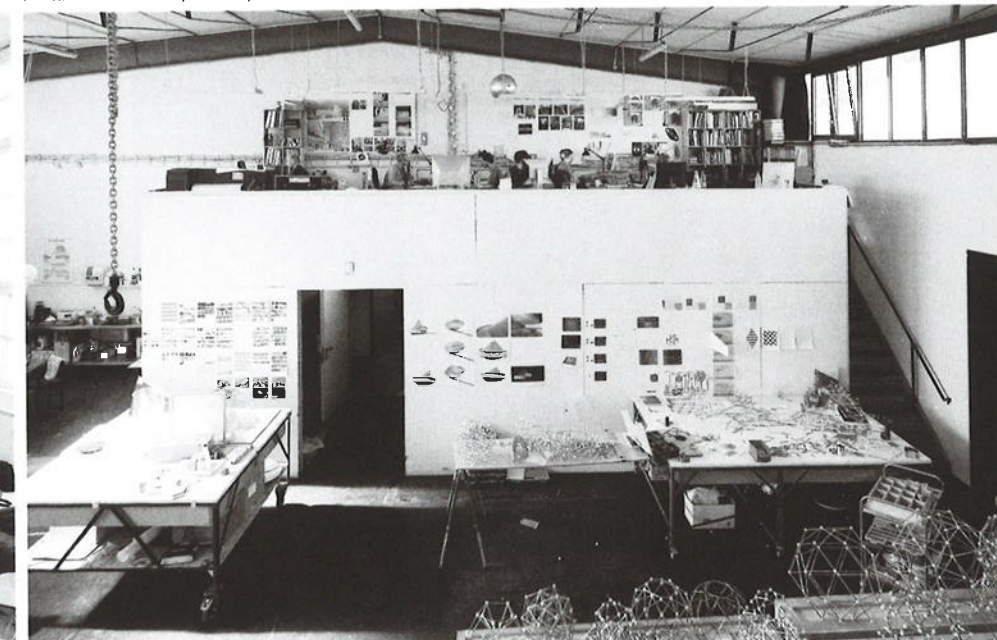
Feeding this entire interwoven organism is the kitchen. It quite literally supplies the energy that powers our daily activities.

The approximately ninety people working in the studio, across three floors, crowd into the kitchen each day at lunchtime. Sitting around one long table, sharing food, we take the opportunity to get inspiration from unexpected corners, while also engaging in pragmatic conversations about work, chitchat, or exchanging the odd piece of gossip. After lunch, rotating groups of studio members do the dishes and clean the tables. We treasure the sometimes unpredictable outcomes of our mealtimes.

The kitchen started out on a much smaller scale about thirteen years ago. At that time, studio members would take turns cooking for the rest of the team, then a group of about fifteen people. In 2005, when it became impractical to wait until four in the afternoon for the chicken to be served, it was

clear that someone was needed especially for the kitchen; that is when artist, food activist, and cook Asako Iwama was brought in to cook for the expanded team. She was joined six months later by Lauren Maurer, and for many years, the two ran the kitchen with great empathy and dedication, bringing with them specialized knowledge concerning the many issues surrounding cooking and food. The making of this book marked the conclusion of almost ten years of cooking and co-thinking by Asako, who has now gone on to pursue other projects. The kitchen team is now headed by Lauren Maurer, together with Christine Bopp,

Invalidenstrasse, Berlin, 2003–2008



The Body Is a Small Universe

Asako Iwama and
Lauren Maurer

Do I listen to my body's signals?
Can I feel the vibration of my
cells? How do I feel when I wake
up in the morning? How are my
organs? Touching and feeling
my body, feeling the tempera-
ture of my skin, gently placing
my hand to heal.

I might feel like eating clear,
warm, salty soup or crunchy,
toasted bread with honey and
butter.

During the day, in the moment
of doing, we find ourselves for-
getting our body. There is a tight-
ness in the neck and shoulders.
We focus on breathing in and out.

We need to know how we feel in
order to recognize the other.

The act of cooking is thinking
and doing in fluid motion. Cook-
ing is being in motion, navigat-
ing our sensations, connecting,
and transforming. Resonating
with each element in motion. It
is an act of translation between
kitchen and studio, my appetite
and yours, different ingredients,
tangible matter and idea, body
and universe, wholeness and
particle. It is the continuous trans-
formation of nature and culture,
serving and being served, ex-
pectation and satisfaction, akin
to the moon tide, coming and
leaving.

Cooking is being in the flow: the
permeable skin between body,
plants, seeds, microbes, min-
erals, sun, moon, planet Earth.

The continuous process of being
enfolded into what we are and
what we eat.

Being in the kitchen is to be pres-
ent, to receive other life: plants
grown and harvested become
part of us when we eat. With full
respect, we prepare the ingredi-
ents in a simple manner, keeping
their flavor and texture. Intuition
lets us listen and savor their
taste. We prepare green beans,
boiled quickly and sprinkled with
salt. The kitchen is an alchemic
space: fire and water, earth and
air; the place where elements
resonate. Being in a kitchen or
garden, by thinking and learning,
we transform ourselves.

The act of cooking is questioning.

Why do we need to eat? What
do we want to eat? Where
does the food come from? How
did it grow? How do we eat -
together or alone? What is the
meaning of sharing? The mean-
ing of hunger? These questions
generate and navigate us. They
form us. How will we commit?

Working together in our kitchen,
we resonate with each other's
rhythm. The awareness of being
part of a larger whole roots us;
practicalities help us to focus.

Cooking is a circular movement
to meet the other.

Mind map created by Asako
Iwama during the initial
brainstorming process for
The Kitchen

network

writing story

Hunger

Eating

Food as c

the filling of a lack

world processing

shelf is storage of knowledge

specific

consumption

assimilation

in corporation

Culture

collecting
Harvesting,
forage
get

Storage
acquiring

practice

cooking: is ritual activity
receiving other life

Other

time

memory

Soil
land
place

eating

processing

labor

field work

go to the

Energy

Circulation

Season

mind
body

HAND

recognizing

social

obligation

responsibility

commitment

production

cooking

whether

information

Energy

Circulation

Season

tradition

culture

detachment

serious

enthusiasm

EATING

morlism

taxonomy

classification

organism

systematic

five

Life Is Space (LIS) is a series of daylong events that have been organized by Studio Olafur Eliasson on four occasions since 2006. In a day of presentations, discussions, and experimentation, the studio team and participants from the Institut für Raumexperimente come together with friends and guests – scientists, artists, theorists, spatial practitioners, and movement experts. Each Life Is Space orbits, asteroid-like, around a general theme.

LIS 1 (June 2006) was inspired by the idea of “feelings as actions”; LIS 2 (June 2007) focused on the relation between models and reality; LIS 3 (May 2008) dealt with the relativity of light and color; and LIS 4 (June 2011) pursued ideas about embodied thought.

The informal structure of the events – with no distinction made between experiments, discussions, and casual conversations – results in a long suc-

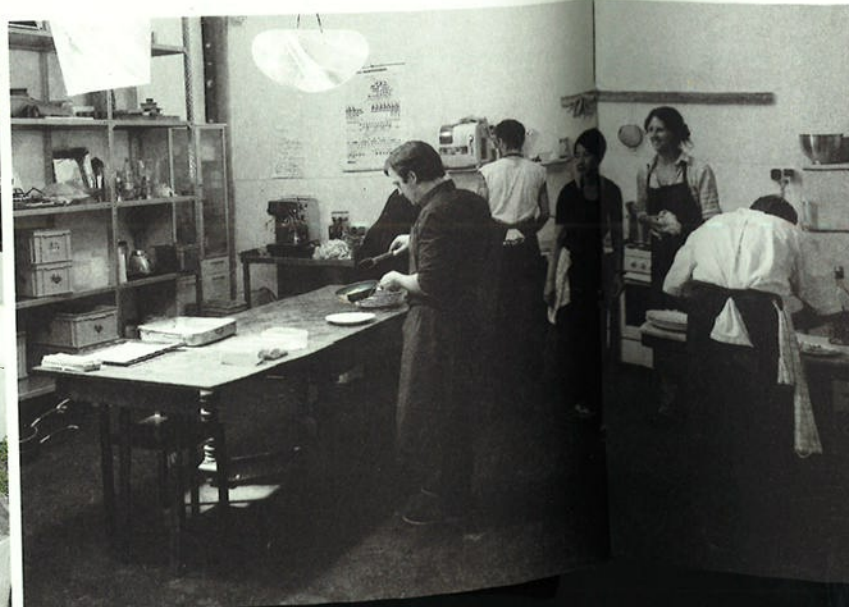
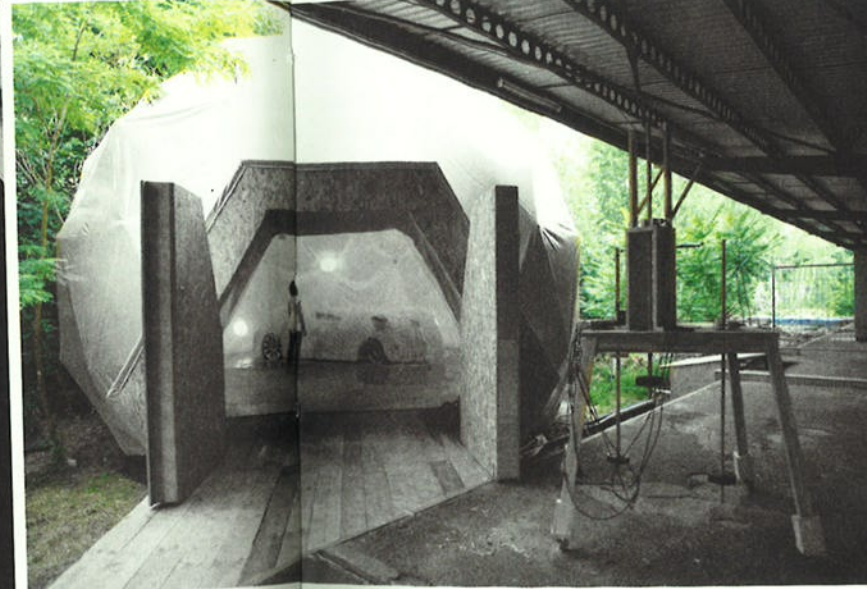
cession of ideas, exercises, and an exploration of our senses. Conversations that take place during coffee and lunch breaks are as productive as presentations prepared in advance. To encourage such dialogue, food experiments have been integrated into the events since 2007. At LIS 2, for example, Danish chef René Redzepi served a series of dishes that dealt with our perception of time and space.

The food experiments of LIS concern the essential duality implicit in eating together: When I eat, it is an experience that is extremely individual. But by eating together with others, I situate my experience within a space that is very much collective – the meal, the act of eating together, the shared conversation. We convert into energy the same ingredients, prepared and seasoned in a similar way. It is therefore, in a sense, a common experience. But since you have

a different set of taste buds, a different body, a different history, and different preferences, your experience may radically differ from mine. Of course, just as I can never be entirely certain that the color I call blue is the same blue for everyone else on the planet, taste is relative. What we have in common is that we are different.

Olafur Eliasson

LIS 1, 2006



LIS 2, 2007:
During the symposium, Danish chef René Redzepi presented a plateful of milk skin with grass, flowers, and herbs taken from the very field where the milk cow had grazed.