

Why Chop Five Kilos of Lettuce

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The act of sharing a free meal with accidental strangers has become an archetypical strategy in contemporary art. It has been interpreted as a call for togetherness and ethicality, or as a laboratory of utopian community without social hierarchies. This presentation focuses on the subject didactics course, which seized these ideas in the context of visual arts teacher education. It continues the long-term process by teacher educators at Aalto University of reframing the conceptual basis of didactical studies included in the Programme of Art Education curriculum.

As a part of the course, the students organized a seminar event, targeted for their teaching practice supervisors. Preparing a generous dinner and sharing it with seminar participants was thought to serve as an intervention to the social order between participants - i.e. those who know and whose words are heard (the supervisors, university teachers and visiting “experts”), and those who are supposed to receive the knowledge (the “ignorant” students). Thus mixing up the elements of traditional academic seminar, performative art event and informal social gathering aimed at generating a space for equal encounters between the participants.

The guests enjoyed the event, and so did we teachers. However, the students’ comments afterwards - “whom was this seminar for?” - evoked some critical reflections: how did chopping piles of lettuce for the dinner enhance their agency as art educators in contemporary society? If the event was supposed to be a kind of experimental rehearsal for equal society, did it succeed?