

## Interview with Jonatan Leer, March 2019

Jonatan Leer is docent and research leader in food- and tourism research at professionshøjskolen Absalon, Roskilde. He has been researching food culture in more than a decade and published more than 30 articles and book chapters about the conflicts, feelings and communities which are part of our meal and food culture.

Jonatan's Ph.D. thesis was named Ma(d)skulinitet (food and masculinity) and was about masculinity and cooking among European celebrity chefs. He has also written about the new Nordic kitchen, food pedagogy and gastro nationalism in media and the handling of diversity around meals in Danish kindergartens.

Jonatan has edited the anthologies Food and Media (Routledge 2016) og Perspektiver på Smag (perspectives on food) (2007), and as his latest accomplishment he has published a little book in the series of Tænkepauser (moments of thought) about one of our times most discussed subjects: MEAT.

He has contributed to the anthologies Food and Age in Europe (Routledge 2019), Alternative Food Politics (Routledge 2018), Food and Popular Culture (Bloomsbury 2017), Food, Masculinities, Home (2017).

Jonatan is also visiting lecturer at University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy, and a member of the Danish gastronomical academy.



### **What does “food culture” mean to you?**

Food culture is the social (and changing) practices related to everything involving food from production to consumption.

### **Why are food culture studies relevant in your perspective?**

I believe it is important to study food for two reasons: 1) at a semiotic level to understand how food practices and ideals are performed in different contexts and how these change across time, cultures, social milieu, subcultures, geography... 2) at a political level to see how certain ideologies and norms shapes our relation to food and how food practices reproduce and negotiate ideology, morals and political agendas.

### **What is your favourite food/dish, and why?**

Steak tartare and a great bottle of red wine. Tartare is a very simple and a very complex dish – sophisticated rawness, a vehicle of so many cultural meanings, and a balance of exclusivity and mild disgust, bizarre texture and tasty clarity. Every tartare is filled with memories of the many wonderful versions (and places) of this dish I have encountered in my life. And most importantly, you can't eat a steak tartare fast. It is “deep eating” and oblige the eater to engage in a therapeutic meal.

### **How does your work relate to food culture/in what way do you work with food culture?**

I have worked in various ways with food culture and I have often used my work to encourage food consumers (meaning all of us) to think critically about cultural and often “invisible” norms related to food. Notably in relation how food mark social hierarchies between men and women or people of different cultures and ethnicities or how food education is highly normative and often reductive in its understanding of food.

### **Please tell us about the most exciting experience you have had with food(culture)**

MANY and they just keep coming. Most recently, I had the pleasure of giving a few guest lectures at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Piemonte. During one of many great dinners at that occasion, I had a grilled artichoke with a creamy goat cheese. Green and burned flavours with acid creaminess...

### **Where would you like to see the study of food culture go in the near future / what perspectives on food culture needs more attention in your opinion?**

I believe we have to engage more with the impact of the digitalization of food and how that reframe the way we eat from the extremely rapid circulation of global trends, to the redesigning of our restaurants and our meals, to the creation of new food related networks and communities, to the reframing of the economics and politics of food. Also, this raises new scientific challenges and possibilities. Therefore, I am currently doing an anthology with my brilliant colleague Stinne Krogager on how to do digital food studies and use these new resources. We have engaged 20+ food scholars from around the world. Each of them will describe how they study food digitally and we have obliged them to provide “how to” guidelines to inspire others to follow their lead and help us to understand food in these fascinating and complicated times.