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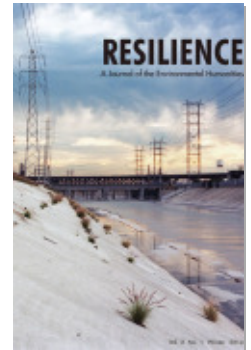
Other Tastes of Modernism

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Other Tastes of Modernism

ZACK DENFELD

An insect powder printed in 3-D, a barbeque sauce made from mutation-bred varieties of plants, and a data-driven cheese board. This collection of art and design projects uses the topic of food to embrace, problematize, or completely reject the Fordist values of industrial efficiency, order, and control. Each project establishes a complex and often ironic attitude toward human progress, scientific and technological advancement, rational planning, and increased efficiency.

The topic of Fordism and food is especially relevant right now because conversations about agricultural production, food insecurity, and culinary futures in policy-making circles and the mainstream media still tend to emphasize efficiency, top-down planning, and technological solutions. Newer goals of resilience, food sovereignty, and appropriate technologies often require a repudiation of Fordist beliefs and measurements of success other than increased efficiency and rational control.

Insects Au Gratin: Geometries of the Technological Sublime

By Susana Soares

Insects Au Gratin is a project that employs images, artifacts, and texts to prototype the culinary technology of 3-D printing for foods made of powdered insects. The project can be read as a fantastical (and possibly ironic) response to the renewed interest in entomophagy (eating insects) in American and European culinary discourse.

A number of university research projects are exploring the viability of insect agriculture and cuisine. These projects frame insects as a source

of protein that has the potential to be more environmentally sustainable than our current production of chicken, pig, and cow farming. The driving force behind this research is gains in efficiency and has little to do with any innate culinary qualities that insects have (although many insects do have desirable culinary characteristics if prepared with care).

Many Western eaters are unfamiliar with eating insects and, without cultural indoctrination, are unwilling to consume or purchase insects as an ingredient. Enter the Fordist solution: insect powder. By crushing the insects into a nonfigurative ingredient, the hope is that eaters will not associate the food product with its source, overcoming their own cultural bias toward eating insects. The dream of creating a fungible food product that is visually abstracted from its source organism is nothing new, but this project adds the twist of using the home-fabrication technology of 3-D printing.

Printing anything in 3-D after 2010 makes it more likely to garner media attention. Perhaps printing in 3-D with insect flour is exactly what is needed to overcome Western cultural aversions to insects as food.

Although this project builds on current research and prototypes a potential culinary future, it echoes the pill-food aesthetics of the 1950s, the height of industrial cuisine. The utopian fantasy that is conjured by this work is of farms, silos, and storehouses brimming with varying grades of insect powder, paralleling present-day flows of wheat, corn, or pork bellies. However, once purchased by the consumer, this fungible flow of nutrients has the additional advantage of being printed at home in any shape the consumer prefers.

These edible sculptures emphasize abstract beauty in order to conceal the material input of insect flour. As artwork, they speak to the great lengths to which our food cultures will go to conceal material inputs that are less than appetizing, however efficient, possibly nutritious, and inevitably profitable those inputs may be. In the past, food designers could slap stickers and labels on food products, but now they can recast the food product itself in endless forms.

Cobalt-60 Sauce: Forgotten Hopes and Fears

By the Center for Genomic Gastronomy

Cobalt-60 Sauce is a barbecue sauce made from mutation-bred ingredients. Mutation (or radiation) breeding is the process of exposing plants and seeds to radiation to cause random mutations. The mutated plants



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

that show desirable attributes can then be reproduced, creating a mutant variety from the original stock. Mutation breeding is an agricultural technology that has proliferated globally since the end of World War II. For over sixty years, scientists on six continents have been exposing plants and seeds to radiation and chemicals in order to induce mutations. Like many newly developed technologies, especially those promulgated after World War II, mutation breeding was touted as a solution to complex problems such as global hunger.

More than 2,500 mutant crop varieties have been registered with the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency. These organisms populate our human food systems and sit anonymously on our supermarket shelves. Cobalt-60 Sauce features radiation-bred ingredients such as Rio Red Grapefruit, Milns Golden Promise Barley, and Todd's Mitcham Peppermint.

In many ways, the history of mutation breeding parallels that of genetic engineering in agriculture. Once initial commercial mutation-bred varieties were released, boosters promised a future without hunger or starvation. On the other hand, dissenters, with the images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in mind, were appalled that nuclear technology would be applied to agricultural research. Sixty years after the launch of mutation-breeding programs around the world, the initial hype surrounding the technology has worn off, and fears about possible human and environmental health consequences are similarly forgotten. Is this the future we can expect of GMOS?

When served publicly, the Cobalt-60 Sauce creates a space for asking questions about the mutation-bred ingredients that are being served and for elaborating on the similarities and differences between the histories of mutation-bred crops and genetically modified crops. Nuclear technology and biotechnology are massive state and corporate undertakings, but the organisms generated by this research have lives of their own.

Shrinking Man: Change the Eater Not the Food

By Arne Hendriks

Arne Hendriks runs the Incredible Shrinking Man project, which he describes as “speculative design research about the consequences of downsizing the human species to fifty centimeters. It has been a long-established trend for people to grow taller. As a direct result, we need



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

more energy, more food, and more space. But what if we decided to turn this trend around? What if we used our knowledge to shrink mankind?”

The Incredible Shrinking Man is about shifting scales and shifting attitudes. Is bigger always better?

According to Hendriks, a fifty-centimeter-tall human “will only need about 2 percent to 5 percent of the calories of regular-sized people.” Although the Incredible Shrinking Man employs the language of quantitative assessment and efficiency gains most often found in the white papers of think tanks, it dramatically flips the object of study and modification on its head. If humans decide to shrink themselves, they will have radically different relationships to cuisine, agriculture, and industry.

Arne prototypes these shrunken futures by creating performances such as the Ostrich Dinner, where an ostrich is prepared as if it were a chicken in order to ask the question “How do we capture, slaughter, and cook a chicken when we are fifty centimeters tall?” Similarly, the Disproportionate Restaurant “investigates how downsizing the human species will affect our relationship with food,” serving food at scales other than normal.

The Incredible Shrinking Man indirectly and directly refers to one of the most failed and dark implementations of Fordist ideology: eugenics. The goals and desires that drove the eugenics movement are explicitly repudiated by most mainstream politicians, academics, and critics. And yet many of the research projects and rhetorical devices found in the contemporary life sciences borrow liberally from the history of eugenics. The Incredible Shrinking Man makes this territory even stranger: it proposes a neoeugenic narrative that flips the goals upside down. Instead of desiring to become larger and more dominant, what would a smaller human kind that consumed less look like? Why would we individually or collectively desire and work toward this goal? These questions are very uncomfortable, but they force us to take another view on the contemporary life sciences, their goals and outcomes, and how they relate to the failed project of eugenics.

Smog Tasting: Eating in the Anthropocene

By the Center for Genomic Gastronomy

Smog Tasting is a performance and collection of recipes that makes the invisible ingredient of smog visible and tastable. Egg foams are whipped



www.the-incredible-shrinking-man.net

Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

to harvest air pollution, so smog from different locations can be tasted and compared in the form of meringues. Egg foams are up to 90 percent air, so whipping eggs on rooftops and streetscapes causes particulate matter and other airborne pollutants to be trapped in the batter. This project highlights one of the many invisible ingredients that is not enumerated in written recipes. Air, water, and soil pollution enter our foods and our bodies and can shape the flavor and nutrition of a dish.

Smog Tasting has also been served in less polluted geographies, where a different approach has been taken. Quantitative air-pollution data from cities around the world are translated into a collection of recipes so that one can taste differences in air quality. Quantitative data are most often visualized or sonified, but the Smog Tasting cookbook creates an opportunity to use smell and taste to interact with data.

Air pollution is not evenly distributed around the planet, nor does it stay within the geographies where it is generated. Air pollution is one of the many environmental concerns that neoclassical economics and the neoliberal economic order have been unable to deal with. It is a distinctly contemporary phenomenon to contend with anthropogenic environmental pollution on a planetary scale.

From a culinary perspective, environmental conditions such as air pollution are invisible ingredients in the human diet. So what are these ingredients, and what causes them? Smog Tasting in public is one method to pose those questions and seek answers collectively.

Cheese Combinatorics: Infinite Culinary Play

By Carl DiSalvo

Cheese Combinatorics provides a playful way to explore how cheeses are constituted by elements such as milk, rennet, flavor, texture, and treatment. A set of dice with icons representing the elements that give form to a cheese are rolled, and cheese matching those factors is served. While these elements and their relations set the structure for the cheese experience, the character of the cheese sampled escapes simplistic reduction to formula.

At its heart, this project is a database that can potentially contain every cheese that has ever existed. This database can be employed in an exploratory or generative manner. For example, an eater might throw the dice to discover the name of a cheese that they have never eaten



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

before or in order to explore the qualities and attributes of cheeses they are currently eating. On the other hand, because the database contains the set of elements for every cheese that exists, it also implies all the possible element combinations that are not currently manifest as a cheese. Someone using this database might ask questions as to why no “raw milk,” “soft,” “goat milk,” or “blue cheese” exists and whether or not it is even possible to make such a thing.

Similar to *Insects Au Gratin*, it is a project that can be interpreted in many ways depending on your point of view. One can see this piece as a satire of control through classification and legibility. There will always be new cheeses or unclassified cheeses or cheeses that somehow don’t exactly fit the classification schema. Eaters may be able to distinguish quite clearly between two cheeses, using their subjective sensual experiences, where the classification schema might not.

On the other hand, *Cheese Combinatorics* could be read as a space of infinite play. The ascensions in the database are merely some known points in the solution space for the problem that is cheese. If this database is used to generate new solutions or possibilities in addition to classifying known cheeses, it becomes a tool for imagining other cheese futures and relinquishing total control and legibility. This recombinatorial play has a lot in common with contemporary digital-media practices, and there is something pleasingly weird about their application in the domain of cheese.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zack Denfeld is a cofounder of the Center for Genomic Gastronomy (CGG), an artist-led think tank that examines the biotechnologies and biodiversity of human food systems. Its mission is to map food controversies; prototype alternative culinary futures; and imagine a more just, biodiverse, and beautiful food system. The CGG presents its research in the form of public lectures, research publications, meals, and exhibitions. Since its founding in 2010, the CGG has worked extensively in Asia, Europe, and North America.