“Food is our common ground, a universal experience.”
James Beard
“Our lives are not in the lap of the gods, but in the lap of our cooks.”
Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*, 1937
STIMULUS 13

Food

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Gareth Webb is on holiday and will return next issue.
Altered Beast
Images by Ben Woodeson

Mega Drive, TV, Bath, Safeway Saver’s Tomato Soup, Copper and Zinc Electrodes.

The piece consisted of a bath of cheap tomato soup which generated the power for an old computer game and black and white television. The computer game was playable by the viewers.
For the Urban Anthropologist
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Editorial

Issue 13 - Food

What is the role of food in culture? How is eating related to inequality? Is there such a thing as a perfect diet? Are you ever what you eat?

Surviving on little or no money in London has its few advantages. One of them, if you are moderately sensible, is learning how to eat properly and cheaply. It took a short time to realise that it is cheaper to buy vegetables from a local market as opposed to a supermarket. When you are eating to nourish yourself, you also learn the nutritional value of food and what is good for you.

This issue we have gathered a broad spectrum of features and articles from all over the world. Carol Mann and Alice Pfeiffer’s photo-essay Mindless Eating discusses street food in both Paris and London, whilst we also have material discussing the cultural value of food in Chile (lalalalala) and the Andes (Impressions from the Andes). Gayle Chong Kwan, whilst also illustrating the poetry section this issue with images from her exhibition Cockaigne, also takes time to tell us about her Manipulated Memory Tasting Booth which explores the relationship between food and memory, particularly concerning ideas of the ‘exotic East’.

I must also take a moment to apologise for a couple of crediting mistakes last issue. The poetry Now I See and We Were Boys were incorrectly credited to Tom and Doreen Giles, when in fact it should have been solely Tom Giles.

The photograph on page 56 was also missing a credit, which should have read “Harvesting a Passion” © 2006 by María DeGuzmán, Camera Query. Apologies again to both Tom and Maria.

Enjoy the issue and see you in two months,

Jack x
Words by Michael Humphreys

Packaged food doesn’t tell the story
How the carrot got on my plate
and how the dirt and molecules
left the carrot in this state
No siree its here now and looks orange enough
and perfect enough, but doesn’t taste as sweet,
as those I had from ‘Demeter’ the ones that were
funny-shapes and different lengths and colours
but, tasted like heaven on the run.
I think I’ve recognised within myself what others have been seeing all along.
That hungry look.
Like I’ve sharpened my teeth,
Like I’m sizing you up
Like I’ve salted your skin
And am preparing to eat you.
Shoppin’ Wiv Mi Homies

Words by William Keenan

Two hoodrats went shopping for sausage
Their image inspired by hip-hop
Since the mall looked most uninviting
To a health store they ambled their bop

There were vitamins galore and rye vita
And things to transform a goulash
But search as they might midst th’organic shite
There was nowt there for bangers and mash

‘Have you tried pickled herring with almonds?’
The trainee inquired with smirked pride
‘Yes we did that last week, with some tender young leek;
We’re starred five in the Michelin Guide’

‘No hoodies’ signposted class warfare
Kept stoked up by food snobs in suits
Yet the ‘snarler’ and earth-clad potato
Take eating right back to the roots.
You Believe in Marriage

Words by Julie R. Enszer
For Kendra

The way you know the tines
of this fork will pierce
soft, baked flesh
and bring it to my lips

The way the gentle bowl
of this spoon echoes
the shapes
we both desire

I hang your belief
on my wall:
a print

from a wood
block you carved

this concave spoon
this flat fork

Together they break
formal dinner-table conventions
reject artifice
embrace utility

This is the way
you believe
in marriage
Ding-Dong Delivery

Words by William Keenan

She rang the bell in hooker style
Sent by ex-navy seals.
He opened up, at eighty-six,
Expecting ‘Meals on Wheels’

‘I’ve come with super sex’, she said,
In silks designed to tease.
‘I’ll have the soup’, th’old matelot sighed,
‘I’m not that hard to please’.

They eased into a rare mixed hour
Of tea and toast and telly
She snored, he slurped, their contract signed
Set off by lemon jelly.

‘Well, that was grand’, she cried aloud,
‘And by the way, I’m Nancy’.
‘That’s nice’, he beamed, and stripping off:
‘What else would you fancy?’

‘I like a man on top,’ she smiled,
‘Maybe a snort of charley’.
‘Oh, mighty me’, th’old sailor gasped:
‘I’ve just got lemon barley!’

‘That’s cool, my dear, I’ve had such fun.
One day, I hope, we’ll … you know’.
‘OK’, my lass’, he spanked her ass:
‘But next time bring tomato’.
The images on the last four pages are by Gayle Chong Kwan and are taken from her new series of twelve photographs, which are the latest contribution to the Fourteenth Century myth of a glutton’s paradise. In the land of Cockaigne all work is forbidden, hams grow on trees, houses are roofed with pies and rivers run with wine. Each image depicts a utopian or mythical landscape constructed entirely out of a single foodstuff. The landscapes share similar horizons and viewed as a whole they combine to form one fantastical panorama.

Yet these beautiful images are constructed from foodstuffs, which are verging on the repellent. The lard is beginning to sweat, the cheese is plastic and slimy, the dried meat infectious. Erudite, ambivalent and multi-layered, Cockaigne explores myths of paradise, pleasure and the exotic in tourism, European legend and the history of Fine Art.

Gayle Chong Kwan is interviewed on page 57.
Organic Bosc Pears

Words by Julie R. Enszer

I wanted to peel them when they were ripe.
Very ripe. When the sweet flesh easily would give its skin
to my sharp, freshly honed knife.

I wanted to peel them and slice them,
I wanted to boil them then
simmer them with cinnamon.

I imagined the balsamic reduction
I would drizzle

It was to have been the perfect marriage of texture
and taste until the pears passed
their prime. They softened. They spoiled. Sour

vinegar seeped onto my stainless
steel counter. When I went to toast the very last
bagel, I uncovered rotten pears.

They smelled. And the poor bagel—its plastic
drenched in fresh-minted vinegar. Still, I ate that bagel.
Its faint vinegar smell reminds me: this is how marriage tastes.
I have recently come back from a tour of America and Canada with the band I play with. Although I've been to the States before, it really is quite different when most of the sights are seen from the road, the venue you’re playing at, and numerous truck stops. But one sense you get, as I did when I went on a road trip the first time I visited, is how bloody big the place is. No wonder the current administration seem to think America rules the world. He’s in charge of a huge place.

And not only that – you begin to notice the big differences between states. Generally I wouldn’t go as far as saying the cultures vary as much as those between say, the UK and France, but in some cases it’s almost that different. And is this is the food issue, it must be mentioned that the culinary differences can be pretty extreme too. Although fast food unites the US on a basic level, the state specialities illustrate the opposing climates and agriculture of the country. Obviously New York is arguably the culinary capital, simply because of the influence of the diverse range of ethnic cuisine (like London) but places like San Francisco have amazing seafood and the famous clam chowder due to the oceanside location. All in all, unless you’re in a tiny town in the middle of the Midwest, for example, you’ll eat pretty well.

But sadly on tour you’re at the mercy of the promoters of your venue. Generally you get a ‘buy-out’ where you’re given about $10 and pointed in the direction of the nearest food joint, or they provide the food for you. Both are hit and miss, as you can be in the most grim part of town with no decent food places, or you can be near a restaurant stretch with every food imaginable on offer. And some venues can feed you stuff you eat purely because there is nothing else, or even have to refuse it completely. Well actually that happened to me on a tour in France, where the country famous for its amazing grub served us a barely heated through mess of ready made chicken curry and lasagne. On the same plate. Escoffier was probably turning, or more likely vomiting, in his grave.

But to survive what can be a gastronomic minefield if you ever find yourself on tour, simply follow a few simple rules:

1. Make sure your tourbus has a fridge
2. Demand you get to stock up on sandwich making ingredients at supermarkets
3. Eat your own sandwiches and pocket your buy-out if the food is crap near the venue
4. Use the saved money to buy yourself the most expensive blowout treat on the menu when you get to somewhere good, and make everyone else jealous and dribbly
5. Just don’t worry, you’ll probably be either too pissed or hungover to care what you eat. Cheers!

“The country famous for its amazing grub served us a barely heated through mess of ready made chicken curry and lasagne”
Impressions from the Andes
Neo-liberalism is not only characterised by an ever more stunning circulation of goods, but also by the exchange of ideas, illusions and dreams. Currently we experience the strongest ideological offensive of capitalism. Everything is business, everything is bought and sold. Everything has its price.” (Acosta 1992:242).

This quotation by the Peruvian feminist was made more than 12 years ago, but it still represents the culture of consumption in Latin American urban areas. The townscape of Ecuador’s capital Quito is characterised by this culture. Food consumption and eating is possible everywhere in Quito. The offer seems to be endless, manifold and omnipresent. Since the 1970’s an export-oriented and liberal capitalism has been prevailing in Ecuador. With its consumption habits and its globally spreading world of ideas it has also reached Quito’s society and since the mid of the 20th century mainly the elites. Facilitated trade conditions and the settlement of several US American and European food companies in Ecuador have enlarged the offer of goods which are up for sale. The market is swamped by global goods.

“Today the pole of attraction is mainly the popular material culture of the United States, and the appeal of these goods reaches much deeper into Latin American society than before” (Bauer 2001:202). Commodities are no longer available only to elites, as it was the case in the centuries following the conquista. Certain global goods are now also offered in marginalised quarters (barrios populares), mostly at lower quality and cheaper prices, thus being available to all classes of population. However, this is only true in theory, as real access (buying such goods) is only possible if one has the corresponding financial resources. Social, ethnic, gender and individual differences between people become apparent (cf.
These developments go hand in hand with “the persuasive power of today’s media” (Bauer Arnold J. 2001:204). The impact of the media in Ecuador today reaches nearly all groups of the population and contributes to consolidating the focus on consumption within society and to making the purchase of advertised products something desirable for everybody.

In 2001 Quito had eight shopping-centres, the biggest of them with around 400 individual shops. The English expression ‘shopping’ is one of the most frequently used expressions in Latin American Spanish. Dealing with aliments and food and their significance in society has turned out to be interesting, as both the biological necessity to eat as well as global and local trends are taken into consideration. It becomes apparent that social and ideological aspects and preferences in terms of taste are more important than the quality of aliments. (Bauer 2001:207). Imported goods are integrated into one’s own food system and also in one’s own view of the world. Foreign influences are “domesticated”, adjusted and adapted. Recent ethnological research on consumption deals with these societal strategies and considers them as means to “[...] self-definition and self-preservation [...] and not as superficial, hedonistic, equalizing drug” Breidenbach Joana & Zukrigl Ina 2000:58).

Quito as a field of anthropological research can be defined and restricted easily. However, the analysis of the urban food system has to take the developments in the rural sector, which becomes ever more marginalized, into consideration. Rural production structures erode more and more and food supply in Ecuador no longer remains in the hands of Ecuadorians, but in the hands of importers. This phenomenon, known as the ‘delocalisation of the food system’ (cf. Pelto & Pelto 1985, Montanari 2003:335) plays a significant role for today’s eating culture. Revolutionary technical developments and the increasing process of urbanisation have weakened the link between food, food production and people’s
place of living. The direct connection to production conditions is thus lost. Mechanisation and the delegation of the production process to the food-processing industry creates a certain distance. This relationship is “[...] accentuated nowadays by the spatial and technological distance between producers and consumers” (García-Canclini 2001:46). The wider the gap between the food production and the consumption sector, the bigger the need among people to get closer to what is called ‘origin’. By buying traditional craftwork or eating traditional food, people want to re-establish a symbolic connection to the ‘simple life’, looking for a relationship with nature. Following the paradigms of the 19th-century evolutionism, this connection can be found among indigenous groups and their ‘traditions’ (cf. Bauer 2001:216; García-Canclini 2001). The consequence is the re-evaluation and appreciation of aliments called ‘traditional’ and of food defined as ‘typical’. This phenomenon can be noticed all over the world and is part of the building of identities in society. (Douglas & Isherwood 1996 [1979], Falk 1994, Howes 1996).

At the same time the quiteños/-as define themselves through their eating culture. Knowledge about eating and the preparation of (Ecuadorian) food is highly esteemed. Within the Ecuadorian society, which is mainly patriarchal, women from all social classes get their social esteem through knowledge about ‘cuisine and cooking. This strengthens the existing gender-related and identity-building assignment of certain areas of life. However, it makes it more difficult to undo or change these specific gender roles. The maintenance of the family and eating play a special role in this context.

The diversity of the eating culture in Quito is the result of the overlapping of various global and local influences. This diversity is reflected in a variety of offered food in urban areas, in spite of the declining purchasing power of the quiteños/-as and rising poverty. It is also shown amongst others in Quito’s urban market areas. Food is offered on the streets by traders, in supermarkets and in shopping centres. Food is omnipresent either as ‘typical Andean’ cuisine or as the globally known fast food. Being an ethnologist with a Western background, this abundance of goods is perceived as contradicting poverty, which is equally evident, and sometimes even as an absurd phenomenon.

29 market places were officially registered in Quito in 2001. (Putscher 2003:13). The variety of goods is large and reflects Ecuador’s ecological richness and the climatic diversity. Traders from different parts of the country come to Quito to offer their goods. The number of consumers at the market places is large, but in part only little is bought. The conversion of Ecuador’s currency system into US dollars in 2000 has driven up prices in recent years. Due to the difficult economic situation, the quiteños/-as no longer buy many consumer goods, which previously were a matter of course.

Market places in Quito are places of social contact and represent an essential and integrative part of trading in urban areas. Trading is a form of connecting people. At the same time these market places are places for eating and drinking. Apart from restaurants and food stalls with seating accommodation, very often beverages such as ‘curing waters’ (aguas curativas) are offered, which are to provide help in curing liver, prostate, renal and bowel diseases. Investment to improve the infrastructure of markets has been made in recent years. Roofs protect people and goods against the sun and provide for a cooler and more consumer-friendly environment for both shoppers and vendors, but fees for market stalls have increased as a consequence. Small traders, who are no longer able to afford market stalls, consequently sell their products on the streets. Very often food is stored improperly and without cooling, which reduces the quality and prices. Social differences become visible.

The majority of vendors are women, who have to face verbal racist and sexist attacks from consumers due to ethnic, social and gender differences. Hence, the market shows itself as a place pointing out the overlapping of various different forms of discrimination and prejudices.

One of the most expensive markets in Quito is the Mercado Santa Clara, where well-off consumers do their shopping. The Mercado Santa Clara is close to Quito’s tourist shopping areas and is strongly visited. The market also attracts tourists, who consider it a place “typical Andean” and “traditional”. Not only
“The market also attracts tourists, who consider it a place ‘typically Andean’ and traditional”
food is offered at the market, but also all kinds of household articles, baskets, medical plants and even restaurants. Prices at the Mercado Santa Clara are higher than at markets in the periphery. Hence, markets also meet the requirements of city tourists.

Outside the market places mostly women offer goods for sale on streets and at places with many pedestrians and cars. Street food has already become an official term at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. By recognising this phenomenon important aspects of urban consumption become clear, which can also be applied to Quito. Migrants look for new fields of activity due to the lack of income in the informal sector in urban areas. They trade with aliments and home-made food. Hence, the income of households is supported and the diversity of offered food and of urban food supply structures is increased. As measured by this, Quito fulfils all criteria of a typical metropolis in “developing” countries. Aliments and food can be consumed at nearly any corner of the city and more than three quarters of the vendors and consumers are women. They play a dominant role in the retail sale of fresh food. (cf. Bromley 1993:152). Women with the same ethnic background very often sell their goods together. They either act as intermediaries (intermediarios), or they offer home-made food as street food in the parks of the city such as soups, chicken with rice, bananas or sweets. The food can be taken away as fast food or can be eaten on the spot. Mainly women or children walk through the streets with baskets full of cooked corn cobs (chocos) in order to earn a few dollar cents. Indigenous women rarely sell food in public areas outside of the market areas. Indigenous people and mestizos with their children walk along the streets, eating bread rolls (pancitos) and drinking Coca Cola on their way. Quito’s sidewalks are full of permanent and mobile stalls, where sweets, cigarettes, nuts sometimes also beverages (colitas) are offered. Food stations with seats can be found at strategically important places in the city, where soups, corn bobs, chicken, fried meat and rice are offered. The multitude of possibilities to eat on the way corresponds to the high mobility of Ecuadorian people. Many
people from rural areas are at least temporary in Quito due to irregular working hours or underemployment. They visit relatives or they look for distraction in the city. They are the main consumers of street food.

Sophisticated research on certain urban areas has shown that the existing food systems have emerged out of a historical context and that they address local conditions and needs. Hence, a diversity of culinary consumption habits is created, which is further intensified in cities. Dealing with eating habits at a certain place, however, must not exclude the fact that one billion people worldwide has been suffering from hunger or has been threatened by hunger since 2002. Hence, consumption has to be seen in different terms. The real possibility to buy goods or food, once a matter of course in satisfying human needs (the human right to food), has become a privilege. The discussion about eating habits is thus not only about taste. It also has to bear its political responsibility.

REFERENCES


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Prices: 60, 40, 35, 30, 20, 10, 5p, 3p
Clothes have a taste of their own and this taste gives them the ability to speak different languages. When a dress is really delicious, it becomes easier to understand its language. Once you taste it and grasp its language, you’re one step closer to the designer’s narrative.”

Bora’s native roots blends with his personal design approach, which also explains the diversity of his collection.

Turkish born designer, Bora Aksu, graduated in 2002 with distinction from the Central Saint Martins MA course. Since then, he’s been quoted by the press as “the rising new name” and “one of the top five shows in London”.

Text and interview Christos Kyriakides
Photographer Ilias Tsepas
Styling Melina Nicolaide
Make up and hair Nicole Dutreuiln
Your autumn/winter 06/07 collection, is entitled The New Covenant. Is it about a renewed fashion adornment, a new binding agreement between you and fashion?

New Covenant originally represented an agreement between God and his people. I am very inspired by the uncertainty it contains. There is a sort of fear when stepping into something new.

The AW/06/07 collection is based on elements that can not easily be described. If there’s an item that I can’t instantly label regarding its inspiration, shape or something, it becomes very attractive. Today we have a need of feeling secure and things we don’t recognise make us feel uncomfortable… It feels better if there are aspects that we can relate to. When I started researching, I was looking for elements that were not easily readable but also did not have the coldness of a completely new item. I like this balance very much.

Your press release included a line from Genesis 12:1. It almost sounds like you were looking inside yourself as part of your research. Is that what the collection is about?

I always start out with something personal such as experiences, thoughts or childhood reminiscences. The collection always relates to my personal and spiritual journey. Then there are other elements I mix in which most of the time are completely unrelated. I believe in contrasts because in real life you always have these, they make life livable. Searching for the right balance between different fabrics is the key.

People who have worked with you say that the calmness evident in your garments is reflected in your studio as well. How can you achieve that in a wild industry like fashion?

Creativity is a very sensitive and personal way of expressing yourself. It’s your unique language to communicate. It is important to feel safe in this personal cocoon and therefore, peace and harmony are essential in order to operate. One way of creating this environment is by trying to see every person through their actual worth and value.

Materials and techniques. Give us your favorite.

When it comes to fabrics the traditional, natural ones are always on my list, because I find the natural fibres always react much better then the manmade ones. The basic fabrics such as silks, cottons and wools have always been my favourite. I usually use a distressing technique such as stone washing or sanding.

This is the food issue. Can you give us your favorite recipe?

When it comes to my favourite recipe I am afraid my answer won’t be very creative. My favorite meals are quick snacks and always change. Recently I am into having poached egg on toast in the morning.
Fine fabrics, excellent tailoring and unconditional design; 25 year old Aitor Throup has just completed his ma in menswear from Royal Academy of Arts and already counting collaborations with companies Umbro, Levis and Evissu. Aitor is more of an artist than a designer pushing menswear to the future.

His recent collection, entitled, “when hindu hooligans become hindu Gods” will be exhibited at the Library menswear shop in Chelsea during the London fashion week from the 16th of September. “The Library”, 268 Brompton Road, London SW3.

www.aitorthroup.com

Aitor links the designing to the production of the clothes in a totally personal way. Can you elaborate?

My work is about creating a more valid link between process and product in fashion. The idea is that the product can’t exist without the process. I have a personal approach to both design and construction and I design characters, rather than garments. This is a symptom of my primary interests being drawing and anatomy. I ultimately want my garments to have their own anatomy. My work is an on-going visual ‘story’ involving my characters as the protagonists. Every collection/project I design tells a specific story of these characters being involved in different situations. My latest collection, ‘When Football Hooligans Become Hindu Gods’, tells the story of eight football hooligans who become involved in a racist attack and accidentally kill a Hindu boy. Guilt and fear overcomes them, and decide that the only way they can live with themselves is to honour the dead Hindu boy by attempting to become Hindu Gods. Each outfit represents a specific Hindu God. This method of story telling allows me to design garments with justified design. All garments are linked by an equally personal way of construction. They are constructed using a block extracted from a unique way of three dimensionally cutting patterns around miniature sculptures of my characters and therefore, branded through construction, creating an additional narrative.

To what extent do the clothes you produce reflect the needs of the industry and to what extent your own need for expression?

I consider myself as an artist with an ability to design. The designs wouldn’t exist without the art, so I suppose that everything I do reflects my own need for expression. The fashion industry has a lot of characteristics that contradict the essence of creativity, such as its seasonal existence and ‘shallow’ image. I don’t necessarily think that what I do is what the industry NEEDS, but I
do think that it’s relevant. At the end of the day, I am a creative person, and I am choosing to project some of my process as a fashion product. Therefore, my challenge is to create a product that the fashion industry, or at least the wearer, can relate to. There are too many new ‘creative’ designers constantly moaning about the state of the fashion industry and how it’s so difficult to enter it unless you have a commercial product. The real problem is that the difficulty lies in finding a creative fashion designer who has the ability to create something honest AND relevant.

You’ve just won the main award at the ITS#FIVE competition in Italy. What happened there?
I was one of 21 new designers selected from around 800 international applicants to show and present my collection in Trieste, Italy. ITS supports new international talent every year by holding a prestigious competition for the fields of fashion, accessories and photography (www.itsweb.org). The awards are judged based primarily on intensive individual presentations to the jury and to press. I told the jury about my process, concept and story, and demonstrated the multi-functional features within my collection. The night after, there was a big fashion show and I was honoured with two awards, one of them being the ‘Collection of the Year Award’. This will support me financially in creating a new collection to be shown at ITS#6 next year, when I will also be a member of the jury. The second award was the ‘i-D Styling Award’, which will allow me to work on my own story shoot to be featured in i-D magazine.

Normally, a fashion student would welcome a job proposal right after graduation. Yet you’ve rejected some and preferred to go solo. Why is that, is there a plan?
Since I’ve been involved in Fashion, it has only really been something I’ve been trying out... as a part of a much wider exploration. However, I never had dreams of becoming a fashion designer, as I think that working statically within one company might limit my overall vision. There’s not really a plan, but throughout my studies, I’ve been working towards creating a specific product. Now that I’ve created it, there seems to be interest around it, and it’s made it almost impossible for me to not want to pursue it. A few magazines have done photo shoots with the collection, and I was approached by Peter Sidell of The Library menswear shop in Chelsea to exhibit the collection, including drawings and sculptures, at the same time as London Fashion Week. A static exhibition is very significant for me, as I can display the complete concept together with the garments, which is something that’s not really achievable on the catwalk.

Regarding working for other people, what I enjoy is generating ideas, concepts and stories, and I also enjoy the challenge of translating those ideas into a feasible product. I think that this is what excites companies when they see my portfolio. Also, people see that although I’m working in fashion, my work ranges from drawing, painting and graphic design, to photography and sculpture. This has allowed to approach some of the job offers with the proposal to work as a creative consultant.

This is the food issue. Can you give us your favourite recipe?
1. Boil the lentils and simmer.
2. Wrap the salmon in the prosciutto (or any cured ham) slices, leaving some flesh exposed, and roast in the oven for about 10 mins.
3. When the lentils are done, drain and season with salt, pepper, lemon juice and some olive oil. Then, stir loads of spinach into the lentils on a high heat, until wilted.
4. Serve the salmon and the lentils on the same plate, and drizzle loads of seasoned yoghurt onto the lentils.
5. Eat it up.
My very first cooking experience happened at Overdale in Scarborough. My grandma who wasn’t dissimilar to the comedian Harry Secombe in looks and stature kept me entertained in the summer holidays by supplying copious amounts of plates for my production line of mud pies. Each pie was meticulously produced and served to my pretend establishment which seemed to demand an abundance of the gloopy and worm-ridden course. Unfortunately the mud wasn’t dissimilar to the pies my grandma baked! They also had a rock hard crust with a mouldy taste to them.

It’s funny but even at the age of seven my need to feed those around me had become ingrained in my personality and I had come to associate food with happiness and sharing with others. My father who had a Jewish background and my mother who had a deprived background had, without realising, instilled in me the need to feed the world, but only if I prepared the food on two separate chopping boards!!

I had not realised the significance of food in my life until I began to research into the human identity and specifically my own. Certain foods evoke a memory to each and every one of us. For me duck has been prominent in my life. The reason being, my mother had tried to force me at the age of ten to eat duck a la orange before I went on a trip to Holland. I suppose she had done it to show that we were cultured and that I could relay to the European family that I would be staying with that we were adventurous in our cuisine. In fact it led to a huge row revolving round the cruelty of my mother
and her ability to cook a cute duck. Ridiculous as it seems I really had hoped for roast beef and Yorkshire pudding as I was going away from home for the first time, of course giving no thought to the idea of eating the cute cow! The tables were turned on me however when on my sixth wedding anniversary I decided to surprise my husband with my culinary talents by making duck. By now I had decided that they were cute enough to eat. Unfortunately I had not realised that he too had his own memories of duck, which is why it learnt to fly again unaided by feathers! We still don’t eat it to this day!

And that is the interesting thing about food- it has the ability to bring back good and bad memories. It evokes feelings in us that show sides to our personalities. Our senses are stimulated by the sight, sound and the smell of food. But more than this food can divulge our own personal history. By looking at the foods we individually love it is possible to see the complexity of relationships that have touched our lives.

Even though we are not aware of it, the way in which we pack our groceries to the way we consider a meal is all a culmination of a generic mindset with our personalities absorbing aspects through generations of dietary persuasion. This is also why I can justify to myself and others that my shopping should be packed in a certain way. The dairy products in one bag the meat in another. This some may say is obsessed but it is all due to the fact that my father was taught through the generations that certain foods should be stored in particular ways and I feel it is now within my personality to assume the practise.

When you cook a cake do you ever think about the ingredients, that is, really think about the ingredients? If you were to describe yourself and your life’s history as a cake do you know what you would you use? As an artist I asked myself this question and came up with The Consequential Cake? The ingredients of this cake were ginger, cloves, cinnamon, sugar, oranges, lemons and honey which all related to the Diaspora of the Jewish people in the seventeenth century slave trade and my Jewish heritage. The fact that I made a cake was a direct reference to the British institution of ‘Tea and Cakes’ and a quintessential part of my Englishness.

When you begin to look inside yourself for the answers to your identity you become aware of the experiences that influence your historical identity. Times of comfort and wellbeing are generally associated with the smells of cooking, such as baking bread, roasting coffee or baking a cake. Times of trouble are recognised by hardship and an empty stomach. But not all food can take us back through our history and show us a richness of life and a family line. The use of convenience food shows us an unidentifiable society, that of one without a personality and no particular identity or if at all one of solitude and blandness that can only be gained from the use of a microwave. The uninspiring taste of a ready meal can only lead to the death of personality within a home. It promotes a throwaway society with no memory of the past and no presence in the future. The additives and the presence of a forged flavour as well as a colour that would only be present on an artist’s palette provide no substitute for the allotment vegetable and the cared-for beast. No amount of preening and advertisement can replace the digestible delicacies that are made with the understanding of the earth from which we came.

One positive form of cookery which has evolved in the last ten years is more scientific approach which allows the evolutionary aspect of cooking to continue.

The movement into ‘Molecular Gastronomy’ is recent but has gained its reputation by helping its protagonists with Michelin stars. Scientists and chefs are coming together to produce food that very few of us could instantly identify with. At first glance it has no recognisable qualities that could lead us to our historical identity, but with closer inspection it shows the work of an alchemist with a chef’s hat. It tests our minds and confuses our senses making us inquire as to how and why? And thank goodness for that, as the art of food needs to find ways to evolve. In the same way that man first discovered fire and changed our tastes so are the ambassadors of ‘Molecular Gastronomy’ are developing a whole knew concept by which we can find our time-line. The reinvention of the way we eat is not dissimilar to the realisation that fire could bring flavour. Meat and vegetables no longer had to be raw, they could be boiled, fried and roasted. For arguably the number one chef in the world, Ferran Adria from elBulli in Barcelona, being able to have the freedom to explore and be innovative is the whole ethos behind his cooking. He is able to make gelatinous masses, with scientific equipment, that to all intents and purposes look exactly...
“This new way of producing food has re-written the cookery books and the equipment we use to cook with.”
like an olive but it is only once you
place the olive shape in your mouth
that the shape pops, flooding your
mouth with the taste of the purest
olive oil you could ever imagine.
Another recipe is to place tiny
orange gelatinous balls into a caviar
tin with a small amount of passion
fruit which looks like caviar. As
soon as the texture hits your mouth
your mind is sent reeling with a
contradiction of sight and taste
- the balls do not taste of fish but of
melon!

Heston Blumenthal from the The Fat Duck at Bray asks you
to try his egg and bacon ice-cream
which is a twist on an English
breakfast but is served as a dessert
and snail porridge, neither of which
sound appetising. However, when
you read the recipe they make
perfect sense and offer new ways
to appreciate food. Blumenthal
works closely with Hampton Court
Palace archive department and
Nottingham University science
department in an attempt to
rekindle our taste buds. By taking
seventeenth century recipes and
giving them a twenty-first century
twist, he is able to introduce
familiar food to our palettes but
with different textures and tastes.
In so doing Heston Blumenthal and
Ferran Adria are able to show the
development of the human identity
through the food we eat.

This new way of producing
food has re-written the cookery
books and the equipment we use to
cook with. Scientists are re-thinking
how their equipment can be used
within a kitchen environment. No
longer do we use a fish kettle to
place our salmon in, now we use a
water bath that gives a maintained
and constant heat while the fish
is cooked to perfection. Chips are
perfectly prepared and renamed
Pommes neuf with a hint of hay
and shaped to perfection to get
the density right when placing
them into a vacuum desiccator
chamber before the vacuum pump
is attached to remove the residual
moisture in order to make them
that more crispy.

Though this all seems
very extreme and unrecognisable
it is a reflection of the way in
which we view our identities in
today’s society. As scientists have
searched into our very being to
find what exactly constitutes our
DNA so they have searched for the
fundamental elements that identify
us with food. As an artist striving
for the unimaginable it is a day to
day exercise, our identities have
to scrutinised and deconstructed
in order to see the truth behind
the obvious. The scientific way
with which we produce food is no
different to the procedure we use
to generate human life. No longer
is the kitchen bible Mrs Beeton’s
Complete Book of Household
Management instead it has
been over shadowed by Harold
McGee on Food and Cooking, An
Encyclopedia of Kitchen Science,
History and Culture.

Food has the importance of
holding memories and experiences
in our time, it is the common
denominator between us all-
without it we would be dead.
But it is a fragile commodity that
must be protected in order for us
to keep it as representational of
us as a human race. It is the key
to survival that is passed down
from generation to generation
without which; we would not have
the knowledge of fire and the
truth of the edible and inedible.
There would not be the coming
together of families at Christmas
to celebrate a pagan festival and
the cremation of the turkey! And
there would certainly be no need
to learn to bake mud pies in the
summer sun. So much of who we
are is related to the fact that the
history of our past is integral to our
future. By protecting our identities
we can survive the bombardment
of processed and indigestible foods
that pertain to be something that
they are not. I don’t want to forget
who am and I want my children to
remember the their lives through
the food that gave them a memory
of life.
Tom Cruise, the Lilliputian heartthrob and Hollywood cynosure, announced in his April interview with GQ magazine that he intended to eat his newborn’s placenta. He also insisted the baby be delivered in silence, in adherence to Scientologist tradition, which leaves one wishing he would apply the same principle to the delivery of his lines. While the latter piece of news was simply odd, the former was, to some, downright ghoulish. The couple’s more gullible followers must have greeted the headlines heralding Suri’s arrival with a mixture of curiosity and alarm.

Cruise’s comments were most likely made in jest, but they sparked a minor furore in the media: “Is it safe to eat a placenta?” pondered the Daily Mail, only to decree that it poses food infection risks if eaten raw. A newspaper calling itself the Arizona Republic branded him “crazy” (a silly term to use for a mere cultist). And all over chat shows, tabloids and online forums the question loomed: “Is Tom Cruise a cannibal?” (The answer, were he to follow his claim through, is yes – the placenta consists of human tissue).

A person who has tapped into the public’s fascination with the visceral is Mark Nuckols, CEO and founder of Hufu LLC. Hufu is a tofu-based product that, supposedly, simulates the taste and texture of human flesh. It is marketed as a healthy alternative for “cannibals who want to quit”, but has
no doubt attracted a swarm of overzealous anthropology students and horror film dweebs. According to Nuckols, hufu resembles beef but is slightly softer and sweeter. (At the time of publication, the eathufu.com website was not functional – I suspect the product was discontinued on grounds of public decency or some other piece of priggishness).

But what do the culprits themselves have to say about human flesh? To Albert Fish, the “Werewolf of Wisteria”, it tasted like veal. Jeffrey Dahmer had a favourite part, the bicep, which he thought was just like “fillet mignon”. Issei Sagawa, the effete Japanese who cannibalised a Dutch woman in 1981, recalls the meal with typical oriental daintiness: “Fat is very like yellow corn, and cut, cut, cut and finally I could find the red one. I cut and I put the red meat in the mouth”, where it melts “like a perfect piece of tuna”.

Now a celebrity in his native country, Sagawa has written novels, appeared in films, exhibited paintings and reviewed restaurants. To this day, he pens a weekly column for a national tabloid. Sagawa is a very Japanese phenomenon: he embodies an atrocity that has been made “cute” with an almost infantile disregard for morality. His status is the result of a culture that is highly formalist and, as such, sees aesthetic value in his persona outside its social context.
This formalism is so far-reaching, that it even encompasses that most instinctive of human activities: sex. Take, for example, the stylised complexities of shibari (Japanese bondage), where the emphasis is on the ritual itself rather than the sexual act, and the practice of bukkake, which signifies a move from the concrete (a group of men ejaculating on a woman’s face) towards the abstract (a woman drowning in semen). To these, one might add the culinary oddity that is nyotaimori or “body sushi”.

In nyotaimori, sushi or sashimi is eaten from the nude body of a woman. Although far from common in Japan and usually linked to prostitution, this exotic kink goes at least as far back as Ito Hirobumi, the first Japanese prime minister. Nyotaimori arouses for the same reason that Allen Jones’ *Girl Table* stirs the loins: it reduces the female body to an object that serves a specific function (the assumption being that this function is dictated by a man). This abasement is deeply erotic. Yet the implications of flesh-eating are also strong, if not literal: the skin, flesh and bones that are the woman’s body become the platter on which the raw fish is presented for consumption.

Sexual cannibalism is also an objectification of the human body, albeit an extreme form of it. “I trained myself to view people as objects of potential pleasure [...] instead of complete human beings”, said Dahmer in one of his psychiatric examinations. The victim is in this way transformed into game, gobbets, stool. Anthropophagy is, then, destruction by digestion. (Rather fittingly, according to Fijian war tradition, eating an enemy’s corpse annihilated his soul.)

There is perhaps no single work of art that better limns this conspiracy of hunger, lust and brutality than Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Children*. He paints the titan as a vast, voracious Satyr spat out by the midst of hell, both hands gripping his prey with clenched fists, his eyes and mouth dilated in a grimace of sexual urgency. The composition is, of course, rich in symbolism and as all great works of art, calls for more than one interpretation. Indeed, the casual observer might see in this menacing image of cruelty no lewdness whatsoever; yet there are two clues that belie this assertion.

Goya’s *Black Paintings* (to which *Saturn* belongs) were hacked off the walls and attached to canvas in a restoration attempt that started in 1874 by Salvador Cubells. This was one ham-fisted meddling of a job: X-ray studies indicate that the originals were repainted and tampered with. Early pre-restoration photographs by Jean Laurent reinforce this notion, and, in particular, suggest that the main figure in *Saturn* had a partly erect penis, which Cubells concealed to avoid offence. The gender of the devoured body is also ambiguous – it could be a son or a daughter, but it almost
“Tales of far-flung savages feasting on unsuspecting explorers have long been engrained in European minds”
certainly is an adult, in contrast to, say, Rubens’ depiction of the same theme, where the titan tears into a well-fleshed toddler.

Goya’s *Saturn* is a product of high Romanticism. It trades classical mythology for a nightmarish *terribilità* laden with sadism and thereby paints a darkly erotic personal vision. The punning *Estan Calientes* (“They are Hot”) is a less bloody but equally disturbing mating of greed and lechery. It portrays a group of priests gobbling down hot soup. In the background one can distinguish a figure holding a plate with what seems like a human head. The self-explanatory *Cannibals Preparing their Victims* and *Cannibals Beholding Human Remains*, meanwhile, are more traditional representations of cannibalism, although the skin of the natives is not much darker than that of their victims; man-eating here too must be viewed as an allegory.

Tales of far-flung savages feasting on unsuspecting explorers have long been engrained in European minds. Under Isabella’s reign, conquistadors were not allowed to enslave Native American tribes unless they practised cannibalism. Accounts of man-eating were therefore often exaggerated or fictitious. The use of cannibalism to justify slavery by colonising Christians bears an irony that wouldn’t be lost on historian Arthur Weigall, who in his treatise *Paganism in Our Christianity* explains that the ceremony of transubstantiation, as set forth in the Last Supper, is “of very ancient, and originally cannibalistic, inception.” What’s more, throughout 17th century Europe, concoctions made of human body parts, mainly procured from executed criminals, were widely used as medicine (fresh blood, for instance, was considered a cure for epilepsy).

Given the hogwash surrounding the matter, it is easy to see why many anthropologists have brushed culture-specific cannibalism aside as a racist myth. These claims were mostly voiced in the 80’s, for many the dawn of political correctness. However, the evidence for the existence of human-eating in certain tribes and civilisations is near conclusive, ranging from 800,000-year-old bones found in Spain to 19th century anthropophagy in Fiji.

To cite but a few examples, certain Aztec codices include drawings of human parts being cooked or eaten, while skeletal remains excavated at temple complexes in Tenochtitlan have cut marks that suggest flesh removal. Perhaps most poignant of all, in April 2000, human skulls and bones dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age (about 3,000 years ago) surfaced, of all places, near Eton College, Berkshire. They showed clear signs of being processed for food.

“Believe nothing of what you hear, and only half of what you see”, goes the old proverb, but if archaeological findings won’t prompt History’s doubting Thomases to pull their heads out of the sand, perhaps the recent developments in Liberia and Indonesia will. During the 1996 battle of Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, a country long plagued by civil war, accounts stated that fighters “targeted their enemies […], removed their victim’s body parts and ate them in front of civilians.” A few years later, journalist Richard Lloyd Parry reported outbreaks of cannibalism between the Dayaks of Borneo and settlers from Madura.

Cannibalism is anything but a myth. In certain far corners it is sometimes a daily reality. We are fascinated by it, but are too scared to get to know it. We fence it off like a beast that can’t be tamed or a demon that must be exorcised. If it must be called a myth, it is only so in the sense that it lives amongst us, in our art, history, religion and mores. The historian Jules Michelet said of Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa*, that work of macabre splendour that depicts the shipwrecked sailors scavenging for human flesh, “It is France herself, our whole society, that he has embarked on this raft”; yet he could have been speaking of any society we’d care to mention.

**FURTHER READING**


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Lucie-Smith E. Sexuality in Western Art. 1991; London, Thames & Hudson Ltd.

Weigall A. Paganism in Our Christianity. 2003; Whitefish, RA Kessinger Publishing Co.
Eating is often a social act, one of communal sharing and intimacy. Think BBQs with friends, romantic dinners and businessmen wooing each other over long lunches. As a child, family mealtimes were often aggressive affairs I wished I could avoid. The kitchen table was a place of psychological warfare – I would sit tight eating a generous helping of marital discord, hoping I could desert dessert before the sniping started. Invariably, one of us would storm off, sometimes in tears.

Nowadays I prefer to eat alone. I am capable of enjoying dining in company, but I suffer from a strain of Post Traumatic Meal Syndrome that involves a deep-seated fear of flying cutlery. Dinner for one leaves me far more relaxed – no stony glares across the table; it’s just me and my food.

Just because I am a frequent lone diner, however, does not mean that I eat badly. I am happy to spend an hour cooking for myself and often do so. The ritualistic nature of preparing food is as important as the quality of the ingredients. Think of the sacred meals such as Holy Communion or Seder – simple foods prepared in a loving and considered way are recipe enough for a very special experience. However, my solo culinary adventures are often met with surprise by friends – ‘You’re making that just for yourself?’ They tend to spend time or money cooking only when they have guests. When alone it’s a microwave meal or something quick, cheap and easy. My roast dinners for one are viewed by some as flagrant self-indulgence. The view that we should reserve luxury foods for social occasions is echoed by the French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, who notes that ‘saumon mayonnaise and aspics de foie gras are some of the delicacies which one would not buy and consume alone without a vague feeling of guilt’. Guilt? Why should I feel guilty? Feeding myself well sometimes seems to elicit the sort of response I might expect had I announced that I had just spent all weekend in bed masturbating.

Masturbation…The relationship between food and sex is well-documented. Just think of the stars of cooking pornography, Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver, as they drool over fresh asparagus and chocolate sauce. Next to sex, eating is the most sensual act I know. Both sex and food appeal to all five of our senses. Bunny Crumpacker draws a direct parallel between them in her book, ‘The Sex Life of Food’: ‘Sometimes cooking is foreplay, eating is making love, and doing the dishes is the morning after’. Like sex, food must be handled responsibly. It is considered bestial to engage in either unrestricted sexual activity or eating. Fat is fast becoming the HIV of food. Obesity kills. ‘Safe eating’ limits our intake of nutritional nasties. Low-calorie foods are the condoms of food appreciation – they keep the weight off, but they don’t taste half as good.

Really, I don’t understand these people who feel they should feed themselves gruel when alone and feast when in company. Why is it considered so unsavoury to give pleasure to oneself? Eating well on your own is a form of self-nurture. Spending time preparing a meal allows you to wind down after a hectic day – listen to music as you chop the veg, pour yourself a glass of wine and enjoy the process of creating. I think at this point I can usefully draw another comparison between eating alone and masturbation. Having sexual relationships with others is clearly one of life’s more enjoyable pastimes, but masturbation has its advantages. There is room for both these types of activity within the sexual spectrum, as there is with eating. Moreover, I have heard that people who devote quality time to pleasing themselves are better able to please others – both in the kitchen and the bedroom. So I say – go forth and indulge thyself. It’s not just you who will reap the benefits.

Helen McKenna

“Eating well on your own is a form of self-nurture”
E  Chicken Tikka Nan Meal
Chicken Tikka in Nan Can of Drink
3.80

F  Kebab Roll Meal
Kebab Roll Can of Drink
2.20

G  Meat Biryani Meal
Meat Biryani & Can of Drink

H  Chicken Biryani Meal
Chicken Biryani Can of Drink


TUESDAY 4.60
In one of his most famous essays in the *Mythologies* collection, *Steak and Chips* published in 1957, Roland Barthes describes steak eaten practically raw with chips (le ‘bifteck-frites’, standard lunchtime bistro lore) as being representative of the French self-perception “Like wine, steak in France is a basic element, nationalised even more than socialised”.

Can bistro/pub/canteen fare and street food, eaten mindlessly and quite distinct from gastronomy be said to represent a culture? Are the French what they yearn for when they’re famished at three in the morning? Is the British soul truly to be found in bangers n’ mash? What would have Roland Barthes said today?

Rapid urban transformation and accelerated waves of migration have changed the demographic composition of major cities as a quick ride on the London underground or the Parisian metro demonstrates, not to mention their national football teams.

This article investigates at one of the least examined indicators of change, the evolution of street food in London and Paris: simultaneous meanderings take two writers up Brick Lane in London and the rue de Belleville in Paris.
“Both Paris and London are now buzzing migrant environments”

Both were once typical working-class neighbourhoods, filled with fish’n’chip shops on one side of the Channel and charcuteries on the other side of La Manche. Each catered to the working man’s lunch, hastily ingested on a building site or in a sweat-shop sur le pouce as the French say (i.e. between thumb and forefinger). Both are now buzzing migrant environments, with arty gentrification seeping into their texture, each the expression of a particular multicultural situation revealed (if not betrayed) by the food on sale over the counter for the round-the-clock ravenous.

Historically the East End was the first dwelling place of immigrants and political refugees: the French Huguenots in the 17th century, then the Chinese at Shadwell, the Irish, Russian and Polish Jews in the shabby tenements in Stepney and Whitechapel until the 1950s and today Somalis and overwhelmingly Bengalis from Western Bengal and Bangla-Desh in Tower Hamlets and Brick Lane. Belleville, once a village outside Paris famous for its taverns, became home to Armenians after the 1915 genocide, Greeks, Jews from Eastern Europe in the Twenties and Thirties and later from the Maghreb, Africans from former French colonies and today the Chinese. One of the simplest ways of making a living was (and remains) preparing and selling food to one’s own ethnic community, yet local influences are at work reconfiguring food into something relevant for the changing clientele - the same can be said about music, viz. Rock Raï or Bhangra Rock. Two main factors are at work here: first the new generations born locally who have absorbed the culture of their environment as much as their parents’ definition of ethnicity; second the new trendy population of artists/musicians/designers would-be, wannabee or the real thing who have flocked to Brick Lane and Belleville. As one wave of migrants is replaced by the next, the Fish’n Chips or the Salt Beef on Rye of yesteryear, the ‘Parisien’, also known as the ‘jambon-beurre’ (desiccated baguette sandwich with a pat of butter and a sliver of ham) have disappeared and replaced by a new kind of fusion food, urban ethnic of 21st century.

In London’s East End, street food has been modified to purportedly suit both the Bengali and the new glitterati. The result is a high concentration, from Bethnal Green road to Whitechapel road of Instant Fried Chicken and/or pseudo-American fast-food restaurants. Owned mostly by Bengalis, as piously Hallal as a couple of generations they were Kosher, these places offer a cross between standard ‘junk food’ and derived Indian food, often with a soupçon of Britishness. Fried Chicken/Doner Kebab and a side of baked beans with gravy (optional) reflect a desperate need to appeal to everybody. Conversations with the restaurant owners reveal that whilst the young Bengali clientèle tends to buy
mostly ‘American’ food, perceived as more hip, the Westerners go for Indian food. Which in both cases is a very watered-down, stereotyped interpretation of that culture. As the owner of Al-Badar Fried Chicken and Curry restaurant said ‘We don’t cook Indian, but the way Europeans imagine Indian. They want something different but never want a challenge’. The same applies to the relationship between the Indian customers and the hamburger joints. When they order a burger and fries, they still expect the validating stamp of the Halal rules, the availability of more spices, and a choice between curry sauce and ketchup. As the manager of the Lahore Express declared” Kids want America. We give them America. Halal America”.

Belleville tells a comparable story. This once was one of the most Parisian arrondissements, Edith Piaf is said to have been born under a lamp-post in the rue de Belleville. The low rents of the hastily built working class homes attracted immigrants getting off the train at the Gare de l’Est. Here as elsewhere, the corner boulangeries are increasingly replaced by ‘Sandwicheries’ selling lunchtime stodge in a varied guises from the multilayered ‘Suédois (Swedish)’(a strip of salmon with mayonnaise) to baguette sandwiches with, according to the nationality of the vendor may include fillings that include Chop-Suey (at Bonjour Patisserie owned by a surly Chinese matron) or Merguez, a spicy Algerian banger. At ‘Crousty Pain’ on the rue Piat at the heart of the quartier, Khadija from Casablanca sells quiches, croissants, Moroccan cakes and pastillas, a glorious version of the Cornish pasty.’ The French like my cooking, they come back for more’ she says proudly. As for her fellow Maghrebis, they go for pain-au-chocolat, “ The Moroccan dishes they can eat in their own home anyway”. Her sandwich menu lists the following fillings: Salmon, Chicken, Turkey, Gouda, lettuce/tomato/, Surimi, Mozarella, Tunisian, a whirlwind tour of globalised food.

Take-out as an institution in France is hardly a novelty. In the reign of Louis XIV, the scullery maids would collect the remnants from the royal table at Versailles and sell them in Paris: it was perfectly possible to purchase a chicken leg that had initially been gnawed by royal teeth. The traditional charcuteries sold ready-made dishes for working families who had neither the space nor the time to cook meals. Today they have all but disappeared and are perceived as a luxury option for carottes rapées or œuf en gelée sold at extortionate prices. They have been bought up by the Chinese who, from one end of the city to the other dole out the identical would-be exotic version of bœuf bourguignon or poulet basquaise with added ginger and generous dollopings of monosodium glutamate. The ‘Le Caire’ grocery
“Urban fusion food is also about playing with different cultural stereotypes”
and delicatessen on the rue de Belleville is a worthy exception: this venerable institution has been selling Egyptian and other Middle-Eastern specialities for decades to punters willing to cross the city to buy stewed fava beans and pungent ‘mish’ cheese.

The first generation of Algerian take-outs catered for workers from the Maghreb, men who sought work in France from the Sixties and Seventies onwards, until their own families were permitted to join them, which meant they no longer needed to eat out. Their stands have increasingly been replaced by the newer generation of Turkish and Kurdish migrants, who arrived by applying for political asylum. Vertical rotating spits are displayed on every window counter, the greasy reconstituted meat imbibing the fumes of the incessant traffic flow. Despite the legendary enmity between Greeks and Turks, the Doner Kebabs are known as ‘Sandwiches grecs here, because they originally were made by Greek migrants (as ‘Gyros’), and the word ‘Grec Frites’ is emblazoned on every Turkish restaurant, along with lurid photographs. This describes a dubious delicacy served with chips ketchup and/or mayonnaise, but this being France, salad and cucumber as well. According to Kamal of the ‘Aslan Azkar’ restaurant on the rue de Belleville “in Turkey, kids would n’t touch ketchup, we have yoghurt sauce, here they all want to be American’ And as an aside, he added ‘We would n’t eat this stuff in my place, we want real meat’.

As a homage to the post-war wave of Italian immigrants, many sell some kind of generic pizza as well, complete with a smear of ‘harissa’ the Algerian chili sauce. Young men seem to be the main clients for this kind of food, but girls are increasingly turning away from lunchtime salads (sometimes on offer) as the widening girth of the average French female derrière is now proving.

What’s the attraction of such food? How does ‘Pizza-Grec-Frites get to be so popular in a city legendary for its cuisine and culinary discernment? Some would-be smart alternatives have emerged, such as, Zoe Bouillon tucked behind Belleville’s main drain in the rue Rebeval serving soups and wholemeal sandwiches; but these cater to the Bobos, the ‘bourgeois bohemians’ who have moved into the area. In the office areas in the centre of town, similar alternatives are to be found, but none, ultimately as desirable as the greasy fare on offer 24/7 on the streets of London and Paris. The rise of fast-food and take-aways appears to reflects the development of the zapping culture of a generation that needs to be on the go, constantly, ingesting fodder on the way. Here food seems to more as commodity than an experience, providing the instant satisfaction of finger food and ‘easy taste’. That which was forbidden at home, deep-fried, junk food devoured standing up, shedding surplus on the ground, remains supremely attractive; yet there is an infantile a need for the comfort of a familiar, repeatable experience. On one hand we yearn transgression, but yet crave what we know and a fast-food meal is intended to fulfill both needs at the same time.

In fifty years time, Londoners and Parisians might wax sentimental about the homey Doners they were fed as infants, Ye Olde Doner will become a treasured memory, stamped with the Union Jack or the Tricolore. Something of the kind has happened to the once Jewish bagel in New York. Once the staple of its poorest immigrants, the boiled dough ring has become the culinary emblem of the city, on sale with every conceivable filling from lox to chilies in delis from the Upper West Side to Queens, prepared and/or consumed by Indians, Latinos, Hungarians alike.

Urban fusion food is also about playing with different cultural stereotypes, yet not giving it enough interest to fully invest into one for a meal. Its very hybridity is turning it into something of a paradigm. A remarkable feature is the uniformity of the food on offer from one capital to the next. With local variations Le Grec-Frites alias Doner Kebab alias Shawarma, preferably Halal, has conquered the streets as some kind of new hegemonic Eurogrub, much in the same way as MTV is viewed the world over, something of a paradox when one considers the EEC’s views on Turkey joining the club or the Bush/Blair crusade against the Axis of Evil. This is surely a united Europe’s answer to the Macdonald empire, perhaps the only feature Europeans of every ilk can agree about. Perhaps the EEC’s blue flag should be redesigned with a glittering Doner embroidered within the select circle of stars.
Mary and The Boy were formed in 2004. They have appeared in numerous places in Athens. Lately they opened concerts for Four Tet, Holly Golightly and Marc Almond. They are now recording their first album with Sonic Playground Records.

Mary (vocals)
The Boy (vocals, piano)
The Exotic (dancer)
Someone described your music as “Elizabethan virginals sung by Diamanda Galas”. Do you think that’s accurate?

Perhaps...perhaps...perhaps...

Mary seems to have quite a temper. What is it that makes her so angry?

I have a message from God. It’s a simple preacher’s technique to make His word clear for everyone.

One of your songs is called “Kill all the Greeks in London”. What makes you want to exterminate them?

Because they deserve it.

How did you choose to cover Khia’s “My Neck, My Back”?!

First of all we are not interested in covering songs. We are just using elements of already existing material to protest.

Tell us a bit about the exotic dancer you have onstage.

The Exotic was born in 1981. She did her first dance lessons from the age of 4. She wasn’t a good student at school but she was very fond of the class of Biology and History of Art. Her favorite flavor is the so called “burger”. Her favorite band is the Sex Pistols. She is a Chanel admirer. She in not a real blonde and she often speaks with metaphores.

So, who are Mary & the Boy?

Mary and The Boy are two Biblical figures. They travel through time and collect experiences from different times and places. They are presenting their “Recent History of Society”. Right now they are looking for funds to continue their research.

If Mary & the Boy were a type of food, what would they be?

Caviar!

Mary & the Boy are shipwrecked on a desert island. Who do you eat first?

This question makes us sick.

If you were hosting a dinner party and could invite five guests, who would they be and why? Would you be tempted to poison any of them?

Truman Capote, Andy Warhol, Greta Garbo, Adolph Hitler and Marilyn Monroe. Our guests are already dead so we won’t have to poison anybody.

Finally, we would love you to share a recipe with us.

1 bowl of yogurt, sliced cucumber and garlic, olive oil, salt and pepper all mixed together. That’s the most simple way to make “tzatziki” which is our favorite appetiser.
The Last Supper
An invitation for 39 people. Each of us receive a small numbered ticket.

A room, lit by chandeliers. Long tables, set in a square, covered with white tablecloths. We are shown, one by one, to our seats by a charming hostess in a sparkling evening gown. There is something in her manner. A little brisk perhaps, a little cold?

Separated from our friends we sit, thirteen at each table, our empty glasses filled by the other hostess, with red wine. There is an air of expectation, anxiety. We are unsure what will happen next.

Our host, our hostesses, sit at the end table, facing us. ‘I’m ready’, they say to each other.


Some of us drink with them, some of us hold our uncertainty aloft with our glasses, others sit resolute, too nervous to move.

The Last Supper

We sit, sip our wine, and listen to the last words of the famous, the infamous, the unknown, the condemned. We watch as these words are literally eaten before our eyes.

Every now and again, a chef appears from behind the scenes bearing a silver platter. One of us will receive a meal, and throughout the evening, so will twelve more of us.

The meals are very specific; chocolate birthday cake, liver and onion with cottage cheese. Other meals are statements - ‘peace’, ‘forgiveness’. These last suppers are the last meal requests of prisoners on death row.

Some of us manage to eat the meals, others don’t, too self-conscious or just plain horrified by the concept, and the food sits there, accusingly, filling the room with a specific aroma.

We are silent witnesses to the last meals, the last words of startling array of personalities - Victor Hugo, Marilyn Monroe, Frans Kafka, Madonna, Sharon Stone, Noel Coward, Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, George Braque, Andy Warhol, Ludwig Van Beethoven, Lord Nelson, the Wicked Witch…

Some of the words are real, some not. Some are incredibly touching, apposite; others, crushingly banal. The waves and waves of them, from artists, poets, lovers, statesmen, h-bomb victim’s cause us reflect on what we might eat as a last meal, or what own our last words might be, by accident, or design.

Our heads filled with these words and the images they have created, we leave, enriched, thoughtful, elated, glad to be able to examine the

Originally assembled for the Time Festival Gent, The Last Supper was written by Mole Wetherell and created by Tim Ingram, Pascale Petralia and Jessica Hoffman for Reckless Sleepers.

The show was first performed in the UK at Leeds Metropolitan University Studio Theatre, subsequently at the National Review of Live Art, Glasgow prior to UK tour including the Green Room (Manchester), Hoxton Hall (London), Phoenix (Exeter) and the Baltic (Gateshead).

For more information please contact Rosie Garton on +44 (0)115 9111471.

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Gayle Chong Kwan’s impressively-titled ‘Manipulated Memory Tasting Booth’ offers a practical experience of the relationship between food and memory. We got in touch with her in order to find out more.
Tell us something of the history of the ‘Manipulated Memory Tasting Booth’.

The booth was made specifically for the exhibition at the Chinese Arts Centre and plays with notions of authenticity and fashion in Chinese art, food and architecture, and is a development of my work with senses and memory. A selection of pre-packaged commercially available Chinese food, in this case spring rolls, are provided to taste. Visitors are given the opportunity to listen to recorded memories or fictional stories associated with the food, left by previous visitors. They are also invited to record their own message.

In the same way that ‘Chinese’ food undergoes a kind of translation or manipulation into other countries tastes, each memory or sensory recollection is a creative act affected by the circumstances in which it is experienced.

For you, what is the relationship between food and memory?

On a personal level, growing up with a Chinese-Mauritian father in Scotland I bore witness to the memorial power of food, and the way in which meals recall and create social and cultural bonds, conflicts and memories. Mauritius
was a focus of colonial control struggles, in which the different cultures converse through the cuisine of the island. As a twin I have awareness of how memories could become confused and fused with other people’s through the creative act of recollecting and remembering. Food is used in both identity creation and maintenance. Ordinary meals metonymically figure the structure of celebratory meals. Food and meals also play a role in creating prospective memories, we eat in order to remember. Different cultures converse and re-create aspects of themselves through the fusion of eating styles; we taste and eat the ‘Other’. Food is significant for its ability to evoke a multifaceted experience of place. Senses are socially significant and are a situated practice that can shed light on the way bodies experience different spaces of culture. Exoticism appears to be a consistent theme through much of your work. What is the motivation behind that, and how is it relevant to you? Exoticism has emerged as a theme in some of my work, but it has not been something I have conspicuously focused on. Each work is made in a different context and so responds to a different set of social, spatial and cultural configurations. The photographic series Cockaigne, shown at the Chinese Arts Centre, explores the exotic in tourism, myth and Fine Art and reflects the way in which landscapes around the world are quite literally being consumed through and by the tourist gaze. In Mauritius I made a photographic series, Mont Choisy, taken of the temporary structures created by familial communities who gather at weekends on one of the island’s remaining public beaches, in decline due to encroaching hotel complexes that are a mainstay of the island’s economy. Mont Choisy is
the largest public beach still to retain lines of causarina trees which, on most of the island, have been cut down and replaced with archetypal palm trees, seen more in keeping with tourist conceptions of a paradise island.

The booth is based on the design of Luke Lightfoot’s Chinoiserie Room, created for the quintessentially English Claydon House in Buckinghamshire in the 1760s. What made you choose this as the basis for your design?

The booth features elements found in the intricate and delicate fanciful plasterwork, such as smiling Chinese men holding up the door features, tassels hanging from the edges of the structure and flower and shell designs. The expanding Empire created a demand for new and exotic goods that craftsmen in Europe set out to imitate in the style known as ‘Chinoiserie’. Rococo designers, already tending towards the fantastical, seized upon the dragons, flowers and exotic landscapes of Chinese art and applied them, translated for the European tastes, to all the main decorative interiors of the period. Many of the imported goods were made specifically for a European market, adapted to suit western tastes and which created a romanticised idea of the East. Chinese themes found their way into garden pavilions, temples or bridges at Slingborough, Wallington and Wootton and into extravagant follies such as William Chamber’s pagoda in the Royal Gardens at Kew.

The Exhibition Cockaigne runs at the Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, until 24 September. It is open Mon-Sat 10am – 6pm and Sun 11am-4pm.

Chinese Arts Centre, Market Buildings, Thomas Street, Manchester, M4 1EU +44 (0)161 832 7271
By exploring through art her own relationship with food, Sam Sweeting highlights relevant issues for everyone. Now living in a remote part of the Pyrénées, we communicated with her by email...

*What is the theory behind the Hungerworks pieces?*
The Hungerworks began with a compulsive action. I was angry and, like a child, I repeatedly wrote the same sentence over and over on sheets of A4 paper until my pencil lead wore out. I then tore up the paper and ate it. I choked. Over a year later, I turned this private act into a live performance – Eating Words II (2005). I lay in a circle of plastic knives and forks, projecting the video of the original act onto my stomach, whilst writing on the floor in scrabble letters “When I was a child I realised that eating stopped my from crying. So I chewed and swallowed my tears. I consumed my emotion.”

Since my original fascination with the childhood nostalgia of food and the emotional relationships we create with food and hunger, I started to research art therapy and eating disorders. I used the visual imagery. I build my body out of food. I trace the outline of my mirror-image in chocolate. Recently, I have expanded my research into other areas concerning food, such as farming methods and distribution. Without using my hands, I eat an apple hanging from a string to the sound of my pre-recorded voice listing 1288 different apple cultivars grown in the British Isles – Hanging Apple (2006).

*How has your art developed since leaving college?*
I took a BA in Photography at London College of Communication (formerly LCP). I spent my time building multi-media installations, making work
“It took a long time to realise the truth in “you are what you eat” and to re-establish my personal relationship between food and physical nourishment”
about intimacy and private space. My performances were for the camera. After graduating, I started to do live public performances. The presence of the audience gave a different dynamic to the work. I became involved with Transit Station – an artist-led organisation that stages 2-day non-stop live art and performance exhibitions around the world. I have so far participated in Berlin, as part of the Transmediale festival and in Edinburgh, with plans to be in Warsaw next year.

Do you think an education of this kind is necessary for artists these days?
Personally, I found the experience to be highly beneficial. It allowed me to focus on my practice and to have the opportunity to discuss my work and clarify its intellectual underpinnings. I was also lucky to have a collection of really talented students and tutors on my course, some of whom I remain in close contact with. At the same time, I feel it’s important to step outside of the institution to avoid falling into a loop of repetition.

What was your motivation in choosing food as medium and subject in your work?
I was going through a transitional time in my life and the emotional and physical stress resulted in my body rejecting different foods. Under guidance from a kinesiologist, I removed various foods that I was exhibiting intolerance towards. I had already been a stubborn vegetarian for many years and under my new regime I lost considerable weight and experienced hypersensitivity for several months. It made me experience the emotional attachments that I had had with various foods and forced me to research alternatives for nourishing my body. I already had a former pre-occupation with food as a result of my upbringing in Asia. As a child, my brother and I attended religious festivals and ceremonies with wonderful names, such as the Hungry Ghost Festival and the Mooncake Festival, and were accustomed to seeing the food offerings made to various gods throughout the year. I still retain a fascination for rituals, which is reflected in the process of my performances.

The relationship between food and the body is perhaps obvious…
Why do you choose to reinforce this connection?
I always had strong feelings about what I would allow in my mouth and found eating a bizarrely intrusive act. At 12, I developed a psychological disgust towards meat and can still remember the awareness that I had of chewing flesh the last time I ate a steak. In retrospect, I had a highly unbalanced diet for many years. It took a long time to realise the truth in “you are what you eat” and to re-establish my personal relationship between food and physical nourishment. I am also very interested in how deliberate non-consumption is used to exert willpower over bodily desire, in hunger strikes, religious fasting and eating disorders.

You have studied and worked in several places both in England and worldwide. Do you find a different reception to your work based on location?
I find that in certain locations, people have more time to spend with the work. I also enjoy the interest that children take in the work, irrespective of location. They have a really natural up-front attitude towards live performance, especially regarding something as primal as food. My original idea for Picnic was as a bridge between different countries. I consume foods from countries that have been informative to my development over the years and in-so-doing, assimilate the cultures as I eat. There’s also something quintessentially British about picnicking in random locations that amuses me. My aim is to perform the piece in Singapore and thus return to my childhood.

How do you see your work developing in the future?
I aim to further assimilate nature into my work and to draw links with organisations such as the Soil Association in the UK and Agriculture Biologique in France. I am interested in the context in which my work is shown and in residencies such as the Farm Project in Devon, which has an annual exhibition on location. In addition, I want to extend the use of sound in my performances and to collaborate with sound artists and musicians.

What projects are you working on at the moment?
I am concerned with the relationship between performance and representation and am planning to produce a series of large-format performance-based images with a photographer friend. Other than that, in the last couple of weeks I have been doing some private performances with a heard of wild cows in the forest by my house and am currently working on a piece involving carrots and donkeys.
Imagine a Fox. This Fox has to run around a field 10 times to catch a Rabbit. The Fox eats the Rabbit but only receives enough energy from the catch to run round the field at most 3 times. There lies a huge energy deficit in this scenario and in animal terms, this Fox would be dead! Human consumption of food among other things, mirrors the situation of the Rabbit and the Fox; for every calorie we intake there were 7-10 Carbon calories used in the process in order for us to be able to consume that one calorie.

Unlike the mere Fox, at the whim of Nature’s said and hypothetical morbid sense of humour, Humans rely on an ever diluting hegemony of advanced global industrialisation (under the supervision of now widely unpopular institutions such as the World Bank, Inter-American Bank, IMF) and vast international shipping networks connecting every corner of the globe (and assimilating it into the Neo-liberals dream global marketplace), to subsist on the diet of conveniently cheap, petroleum based, imported goods. The only problem being, our unsustainable diet isn’t a metaphor, its the reality of our relationship with most commodities; we over produce, duplicate, triplicate, and quadruplicate until there is such abundance of things that we don’t know what to do with them other than discard them and we end up destroying our planet. Yet on the flipside we allow this waste to go on, knowing full well that we are the privileged few who get to take such abundance for granted, we all feel that shame and guilt and kindly we are handed a ticket out of our grief with the noble causes of Charity. One wonders what, and possibly how much more would be done about the inequality in the world if so many of the well-to-do, had no way to feel better about their meritocracy?

The truth is that hunger is already a stark and painful reality for more than 850 million people, including 300 million children. How can the number of hungry not explode when one, two and possibly three billion more people are added to the global population? Inequity and poverty are at the heart of the hunger problem, according to experts, including the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). An estimated 184 million people in Africa alone could die from floods, famine, drought and conflict resulting from climate change before the end of the century, according to a new report by Christian Aid, a British-based charity. Farmers simply can’t keep up with the level of consumption in the world today: we’re having the worst food crisis for 30 years. Global food grain

**Consumption!**

Tom Minor considers the consequences of being on the top of the food chain.

**Consumption!**

**Consumption!**

**Consumption!**

**Consumption!**
supplies has dropped to its lowest levels. In addition to agricultural failure there are obvious politics involved in the distribution of food and several stringent trade agreements, designed to protect large corporations and strangle small businesses, forcing local producers to compete in an apparently free global marketplace where subsidies go to the rich and small-hold farms have to fend for themselves. There is no logic or rationale to it, its just in the nature of such a divisive system to set the Davids up against the Goliaths as much as possible; thus the system maintains the upper hand.

To those people who like to defend the ideals of Globalisation, come hither and see for yourself, the cracks coming from within. This abysmal attempt to spread everything out across the entire planet has never got more than one toe off the ground before collapsing on itself again. There was no need to force small, local producers to compete with American Multi and Trans National Corporations. There was no need to claim intellectual property rights over ancient indigenous peoples’ knowledge of their traditional crops (as happened with basmati Rice in India, thanks to uncle Sam or was it Ben!!). There is no reason citizens shouldn’t be allowed to know what is in their food, yet the WTO does its very best to restrict consumer information. There are no reasons why many countries ship their domestic products out only to import the very same products from a different country of origin, except perhaps that Globalisation has made it cheaper for people go through that wasteful rigmarole instead of trading locally. The implications on the environment for this level of transportation for food alone, is alarming. Consumers don’t bat their eyelids when they indulgently eat out of season fruits from exotic countries, of course not, we’ve been doing that for years, the difference is now that we’re running out of cheap fuel to maintain this empire of food!

I could go through all the elements of what makes an item of food costly in energy terms, but the only way any of us is going to reduce our footprint, is by taking off our shoes and tiptoeing around ourselves, not waiting for someone else to tell us too. Suffice to say, petro-based pesticides, fertiliser, food stuff, production, packaging, shipping, etc all play a part in creating this self consuming monster.

It is positive to see such growth in the fair-trade and organic sectors of the market, but nothing beats, simple, local produce and trade. None of this processed crap will be affordable in the future, there’s no use in expending precious energy to create a food that does nought but over cholesterise your blood stream and give you empty carbs. The days of convenience my friends are gone! Loads of people are figuring this out, its actually the way lots of people have to live anyway because they literally live off their land and provide for their family, but even markets in rural areas all over the world, deal purely in locally produced food, nothing comes in a box or plastic (well lots of things do-but their normally reserved for the westerners, at westerners prices!!). People simply don’t rely on oil for the production of their food like we do here in the highly developed world. Looks like its time for a reversal.

Luckily it is the end of the growth era for industrialised society, and Peak oil will make sure of that. Whether our governments do anything to make the transition easier is another question but at this time in history, with the amount of apathy felt towards the puppet democracies we live, I believe its time people started undermining the psychotic polarisation of individual everyday life within the 2 party political spectrum and start organising local communities to provide and sustain themselves first and foremost and prepare for the eventual decline in consumerist materialism.

Some people in the world (Norway’s Archipelago 300 miles from the North Pole) are so worried about the ecological climate that they are building Noah’s Arch-esque far underground deep freeze seed vaults to keep a stock of the worlds crops, protecting them from Nuclear destruction or environmental disaster, so that the worlds food supplies could begin life again after the apocalypse?? Whatever you take from that, know this, everything we once took for granted and made our life easier, more convenient, it will be gone, sooner or later how will you respond?

“The days of convenience are gone”
I began collecting and flattening food boxes and containers around 1992. At the time such paper packaging could not be re-cycled and this troubled me. I decided they were not trash and that I would no longer throw them away. I liked their busy colorful surfaces and observed how seductive their designs were in the super market, especially for my two children who were easy marks in the cereal isle. I remembered having to design such a package in art school and had
some appreciation for the work of the commercial artists who composed them and I surmised that many of them were visual artists lost to earning a living. We all have our tasks to perform and a portion of my time was spent shopping for and preparing food for my family. Along with collecting the packaging, I became quite obsessed with documenting the process of meal preparation, presentation, eating and cleanup. I kept a camera loaded with slide film and my partner or I stood on chairs to photograph the surface of the table as the food was eaten. We had a garden and a compost heap and I became fascinated with growth and decay, the matter of life and death that food was to my family, and to all humans and animals.

I eventually began reconstructing the flattened boxes with a glue gun. There were so many they took over my studio and the idea of hanging a net and tossing them inside came to me. The net was 14 feet square and bulging with hundreds of boxes and other containers that by then included egg and milk cartons and some cylindrical containers. One day I was sitting at a table I had moved under the net, reading about the origins of agriculture
When Ravel’s *Bolero* came on the radio. Being a dancer I was inspired to get up and dance to the finish, ending exhausted flat on my back. Ravel’s *Bolero* came into existence when Ida Rubenstien commissioned Ravel to write a piece with Spanish qualities. It was choreographed and staged by Bronislava Nijinska for Ida Rubenstien and premiered in Paris on November 22, 1928. The solo dancer performs a sexually charged dance on top of a huge round table surrounded by men and women dressed as men. I subsequently forgot about the music but the physicality became a part of the piece immediately.

The next day I walked into the studio and an internal voice said “let them out of the net.” I resisted because it had taken quite an effort to find the right net material and figure out how to hang it let alone fill it with all the boxes but I eventually relented and dropped one of the corners. The noise the boxes made as they hit the floor was an astonishing loud percussive crash with some of the boxes remaining in the net like a cornucopia. A period of improvisation ensued that involved moving the boxes into shapes using my hands and eventually a plastic shovel. Finally I re-hung the net, put them all back in and went on with research on agriculture and the invention of pesticides. One of the first insecticides was called “Paris green.” And this along with the discovery that the credit card was invented in the 1950s led me to begin wearing a sparkly, vintage emerald green dress that I had found years before. The idea of becoming the archetypal 50s housewife consumer became part of the piece and I decided to begin unclothed and become her as part of a performance involving all the boxes and the actions and tasks I was experimenting with. The matter of life and death had now grown to include the contamination of our food by pesticides and both our victimisation and complicity as consumers. I began to feel hopeless about the situation and that our extinction as a species was probably inevitable and that to spite what we know, there was nothing anyone could do to stop this. It was around this time that I remembered *Bolero* and decided to use it as accompaniment for the central action of the work. The performance became a ritual enactment of creation and destruction with the crescendo of *Bolero* and its crashing finish becoming a fitting score. 

“Matter of Life and Death (Bolero)” was first performed at a workshop in Rhinebeck NY, July 1995.

“I eventually began reconstructing the flattened boxes with a glue gun”
there to study with Rachel Rosenthal and asked her if I could bring this new work to show and she agreed. I packed the boxes and showed the performance or Bolero portion of the work. When I returned home, I knew I wanted to install the boxes in the net and let them out as part of the performance. Carl Kamulski, director of Detroit’s Michigan Gallery, agreed to let me do this for a show called Time Bombs (October 1995). As I prepared for that performance I kept a diary and recorded some of what you read here. The pre-performance installation consisted of the mass of boxes in the net hanging above an overstuffed armchair. Visitors could sit beneath the net and unlock and read the diary before the performance. The chair is then moved away and one corner of the net lowered allowing the boxes to crash to the floor. The net is taken down and the boxes shoveled into a large circle and in the center area the green dress, and other props are placed on the floor including the net and shovel.

The performer enters nude and crouches down on the floor within the circle. She rises boldly and stretches her arms above her head; lowering them she looks at the audience, takes in her surroundings and sees there are clothes for her to dress in. She dresses, finally slipping her feet into gold high heel shoes. Winding her hair into a chignon and securing it with long red chopsticks she dons her flowered satin apron all with ritualistic aplomb and applies lipstick and rouge she finds in the apron pocket. Seeing and opening a special box of cereal she dramatically eats a single flake. She plunges her hand deep in the box and finds the surprise, a small black pistol. She poses momentarily with the gun and box of cereal and then restores the gun to the box, closes it and buries it in the circle with the other boxes. She sees the Bolero record album lying on the floor and hands it to an audience member. Bolero begins softly as the performer lifts the net and swings it around her body, eventually draping it on her head like a veil. She sees the shovel, picks it up and pauses. Stepping outside the circumference, she begins to push the boxes in toward center. Overcome she abandons the shovel and falls to her knees, using her hands to pile the boxes in a mound, loosing her high heels in the process. Pulling the chopsticks from her hair frees her from the net. Feral like she stands and finding the shovel plows into the mound of boxes forming a spiral. With increasing abandon, she shovels all the boxes away from the spiral’s center, back into the original circle form and falling to the floor spins and swirls swinging the shovel around her like the second hand of an out of control timepiece. Bolero comes to its crashing end as the shovel scrapes a cacophony against the floor. She lets loose of the shovel and jumps up and steps into the circumference of boxes. Chugging her heels she travels along splitting the circle into two, cartons and boxes ricocheting off her shins. Finding the shovel once more she carefully refines the double circle, tucking in stray boxes. She disrobes in the stark silence, circling the area to find her heels, hairpins, the net and other props carefully replacing them as they were and now nude, exits slowly through the audience.

Post-performance the costume elements and props were collected and the boxes were then arranged on the floor in a large spiral and left in the gallery for the remainder of the exhibit (4). The boxes were shipped in an enormous container and the piece was again performed (sans pre and post installation) at the Lyric Stage in Boston on 16 February 1996, produced by Katherine Hargreaves for the Women’s Caucus for Art national convention.

NOTES


2 Whorton, James. Before Silent Spring - Pesticides and Public Health in Pre-DDT America. 1974; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 104-105, 20-23. Paris green, a compound of arsenic and copper, was first used in the US as an insecticide in the summer of 1867 against the Colorado potato beetle. It was so successful it was quickly used internationally and by the end of its first decade it sold at over “500 tons a year in the New York City market alone.” Often used for suicide it was also the pigment used for most of the green paints in the nineteenth century. Additionally a Wikipedia search reveals that Paris green was used for a very old green dye for cloth that unbeknownst caused the demise of the wearer and to this day French theater costumes eschew the color green. Cézanne’s diabetes, Van Gogh’s neurological disorders and Monet’s blindness are also thought to be at least in part due to this pigment.


4 It was after this Detroit performance that I had the dream that led to the project I am working on now.
I would like to make the case for McDonald’s. Not very politically correct I know, but I am a believer in personal choice. None of us can say that a deviant Ronald McDonald runs forth from our local ‘restaurant’ to drag us protesting loudly to the counter and orders burgers for us. Those of us who do enter and eat in McDonald’s do so out of choice, out of hangover, out of boredom. The protesting voices of anti-capitalists, animal rights activists, health and advertising watchdogs cry out against the numerous evils of the fast food giant. Sociological concepts are named after it, books carry its title, and films have been made about it. The truth is that the golden arches are so successful, and such a globally recognised symbol, that authors and film makers ride on its back in a wave of mutually beneficial publicity.

Morgan Super Size Me Spurlock was a working production manager who came up with a good idea about a subject for a film. He was a budding film maker, already involved in the industry, with good contacts and technical equipment at his disposal. He was a man whose ambition was to make a film, not change the world. McDonald’s provided him with a brilliant opportunity to gain professional notoriety, become famous and make some money.

His film’s success was based on its subject being such a familiar gastronomic and business masterpiece, which made it easily marketed to distributors and audiences alike. This caused Spurlock’s decision to do something inordinately stupid - eating nothing but McDonald’s for a month - to go virtually unnoticed. If he had made a film about an unknown but equally evil producer of food, his professional success and satisfaction would simply not have been possible.

The sociological concept of McDonaldisation, by George Ritzer, indicates four elements: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. When considered in a certain way these seem to be desirable characteristics for any society. Efficiency completes tasks, creates speed in results and generally cheers people up. If our objectives can be calculated and therefore quantifiable, instead of subjective, we are more likely to achieve our goals and the phenomenon of instant gratification could be enjoyably achieved.

A standardisation of certain aspects of society, such as economic relations, or the predictability of political change could contribute to members of society being able to make more informed choices, and to rely on what they will encounter financially, giving investment power to the masses, as well as piece of mind.

Ritzer’s final concept of control is an interesting one, as control is a concept that is frightening to many. It is seen as cynical or unacceptable to align anyone with control anymore, even though a controlled society is one that abides by rules, and respects authority. Since when have we been judged on what we eat? Food has historically defined our identities. Lords, gentry and sovereigns dined on truffles, peacock eggs and gold coins (before the invention of chocolate money), whilst peasants ate potatoes, or turnips a la Baldric. Today too our diets determine our social identity, as we judge others against ourselves. Vegetarians are wimps, meat eaters are cruel, vegans are boring, and McDonald’s eaters are chavs, who support capitalism and prolong most of its critics’ nightmare of a hard working corporation holding power over the population, not including them of course.

“Vegetarians are wimps, meat eaters are cruel, vegans are boring, and McDonald’s eaters are chavs.”

I think McDonald’s critics should stop blaming the massively successful organisation for today’s social pathologies, and understand that control should not be seen as something that is exerted on us by an outside force, rather as an internal compulsion that one should wield upon one’s self.
Querencia is a Spanish word that speaks of a longing for your spirit home and the familiar rhythms of your heart. While I was away from my home town of Taos, New Mexico, it was these familiar rhythms that I missed most. As a person of Spanish and Native American heritage, raised in the northern mountains of New Mexico, I thought it would grow easier to be away. In truth, it became increasingly difficult each day because I was lost without the rhythms of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the smell of desert sage, the headiness of high altitude vistas and magical light, the power of alpine storms, skies so blue they hurt your eyes, the passionate blend of ancient and new traditions, the abundance of spicy foods, the balance of a contemplative life, and the intrusive challenge and warmth of an extended family.

One of the strong yearnings from my home has always been savory foods, comida sabrosa unique to this area – pungent green and red chile sauces, hot tortillas off the griddle, posole & chico stews, crunchy chicharones, roast lamb prepared slowly over a pit fire, pots of frijoles simmering on the back of my grandmother’s wood stove, tart verdolagas, fruity empanadas and nutty avas toasting merrily in welcome to daily visitors. These foods represent a sumptuous simplicity from Native and Spanish cultures and fruits of this high desert land. Each is a craft of slower times, interconnected family and rich tradition. These foods represent centuries of family creativity, shared labor and the sustained reality of finding a way to live in a land that is both breath taking and harsh.
No where is this more evident than in the tradition of chile roasting unique to New Mexico. Late summer with its crisp blue mornings building daily into the fierce thunderheads of awesome afternoon storms, brings with it this important time. With summer fiestas, the deep yellow bloom of chamisa, and lazy fishing in the Rio Grande comes the time for green chile roasting. Gunny sacks of New Mexico green chile are sold at road stands, family farms and local grocers. Locals line up to choose mild or hot and wait their turn for roasting. Many feel secure for the winter only with a well stocked freezer of green and red chile and a good pile of chopped piñon fire wood on hand. As my husband and I ride our bikes to the Taos Farmers Market on Saturdays, accordion and guitar music descended from old Spain entertains, tantalizing smells of roasting green chile fills the still air and community is revitalized. Chile roasting time in Taos brings family and community together as we discuss the distinctive flavor and spiciness of each chile harvest and how the draught or the rain of this year has created its character. People from every walk of life gather to reap the harvest, knowing there is no other way to enjoy the rich foods we crave throughout the year. Those who move to Taos find themselves eating chile now and then at first, then daily and end up craving this spicy food in all its many variations throughout the day….in a sauce over eggs in the morning, chopped with garlic on a cheeseburger or pureed in a salad dressing for lunch, and as the sun goes down in chile rellenos, as the base of a spicy salsa, in a rich enchilada sauce, as a marinade for shrimp or even brewed in green chile beer.

The art of roasting these precious chiles has evolved over the centuries from slow roasting in hornos, earth ovens, crisping in outdoor wood grills, to the spinning mesh drums fired by propane flames set up in choice locations around the town. Locals share the latest cuentos, stories, and reminisce about wonderful meals as they wait with their gunnysacks of green chiles for the roaster. As the tumbling chiles roast and the peels blister and blacken, pauses in conversations are numerous as rich aromas entice the senses. It is a blessing to be a part of something that happens in only a few places in the world.

Once the chile
is roasted, it is placed hot in bags to steam on the way home in preparation for peeling. Family and friends often gather to combine fun and laughter through shared labour. Tasting perhaps in quesadillas with roast chicken and sharp cheddar cheese is of course, essential. The blackened waxy peels are pulled by hand from the chile which is then packed for the freezer in bags or small containers. Teasing may occur between those who brave the spicy oils on their bare hands and those who wear gloves to peel the chiles. There is always a bit of nervous speculation as to whether there will be enough to last until next year’s precious harvest.

Chile roasting time in New Mexico brings out the best in all of us. This wondrous labor brings together Spanish, Native American and other cultures; it draws young and old together and it ties artist, rancher, banker and educator to simpler times. It is a blending of ancient and new traditions, a time for family and friends to labor together to reap one of life’s true pleasures. This important time in the rhythm of the year brings laughter, hope and thankfulness to the community as we gather in anticipation of the culinary glories to come.
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