

Decay and Other Flip Sides

Gastronautical Ramblings

About Post-Culinary Design Possibilities

International Gastronautical Society

We ‘gastronauts’ are convinced that fast food, the mass rearing of animals, and discount food is not an ethical question, but rather a question of sensory properties. Whereas mankind has for centuries been sharpening its “view” of things, taste faded. Tongues and noses are detached from our brains, and sophisticated taste combinations form the height of our culinary reception. Mankind has only just begun to design food and to train the associated senses as an intellectual tool. But what is food? And in particular, what will food be in the future? We cry out for local produce, and we like the taste of the goods we get: thanks be to labels. We cry out for fresh produce and are glad to see short expiration dates. That said, we would need to address putrefaction in order to recognize freshness not just by color or the droplets of water on the advertising photo.

In a work for a surreal documentary by Florian Bitterlin (camera: Garrick J. Lauterbach) about a social, psychiatric art workshop called ‘artSoph’ we, the International Gastronautical Society, arranged, at intervals, a giant table full of food and exposed it to decay. Apart from photographs and a film sequence, this gave rise to a temporally unstable work that depicted decay as a process, while we influenced the form it took:

For 80 days we nurtured a fairly demanding, fascinating monstrosity whose smell was constantly changing. It all began innocently with a table laid in white that was almost full of top-quality fresh vegetables that a wholesaler was no longer able to sell. Ready-made pizzas, tinned peaches, French fries, cartons of yoghurt complemented the scene. Little happened for quite some time.

It is March, and things are still fairly fresh in our half-open work space in a rear courtyard: The lettuce is becoming a little wilted, the bread somewhat dry. Our objective though are cloudy mountains of mold in all forms, colors, and textures. We are under time pressure, on account of the date for filming. Though the outside surfaces of the food are changing slightly and becoming a bit greasy, they are still sealed rather than bursting, as if

ashamed of their insides. There is a slight acidity in the air. Only the bananas are really brown. We moisten the table of food every day with stale beer and water and hope the process will speed up, which fails to happen. We set up heat lamps to raise the temperature of the sculpture: The goods now begin to get softer, on their insides something really seems to be developing that gently oozes out of certain cracks. We keep on adding on new produce to illustrate the decay time. Maggots are now beginning to live on the bottom of the loaves of bread. The day of filming is getting closer, the smell is becoming more intense, but visually the table is no more interesting than a pile of forgotten loaves of bread in a cupboard. We wrap the entire sculpture in thin plastic film. That brings about the breakthrough: It is as if the goods' rotten inside now dared venture outside because of the protective foil. Everything gets going! The mold grows rapidly. From inside to outside the French fries turn first deep black, then green. The neighbors complain about the stench and we can hardly bear it when we are working. We buy breathing masks. But the challenge is yet to come:

The entire range of produce, from the freshly cut fig and the half-wilted lettuce, to the egg plants, which by now are almost humus, are ultimately intended to be presented in one sweep of the camera along the table. As such we have to arrange the rotting material. Brown slime with brown slime, green mold with green mold, semi-decayed with semi-decayed. And for us on the set the stink suddenly becomes not just a stink: Hours later we begin to notice hints of yeast, like in champagne. We can suddenly make out different vinegary odors. The sweetness of the decay has astonishingly varied nuances of sweet, which linger in our noses long after we have left the studio. We saw to it that we were capable of the task, but are no longer sure that we can tolerate this capability.

With the series of images that were made of the work we as 'astronauts' assume responsibility and attempt to actively design the decay of food, because only if you are familiar with putrefaction can you judge quality. Culinary design does not begin with cooking and end with eating.

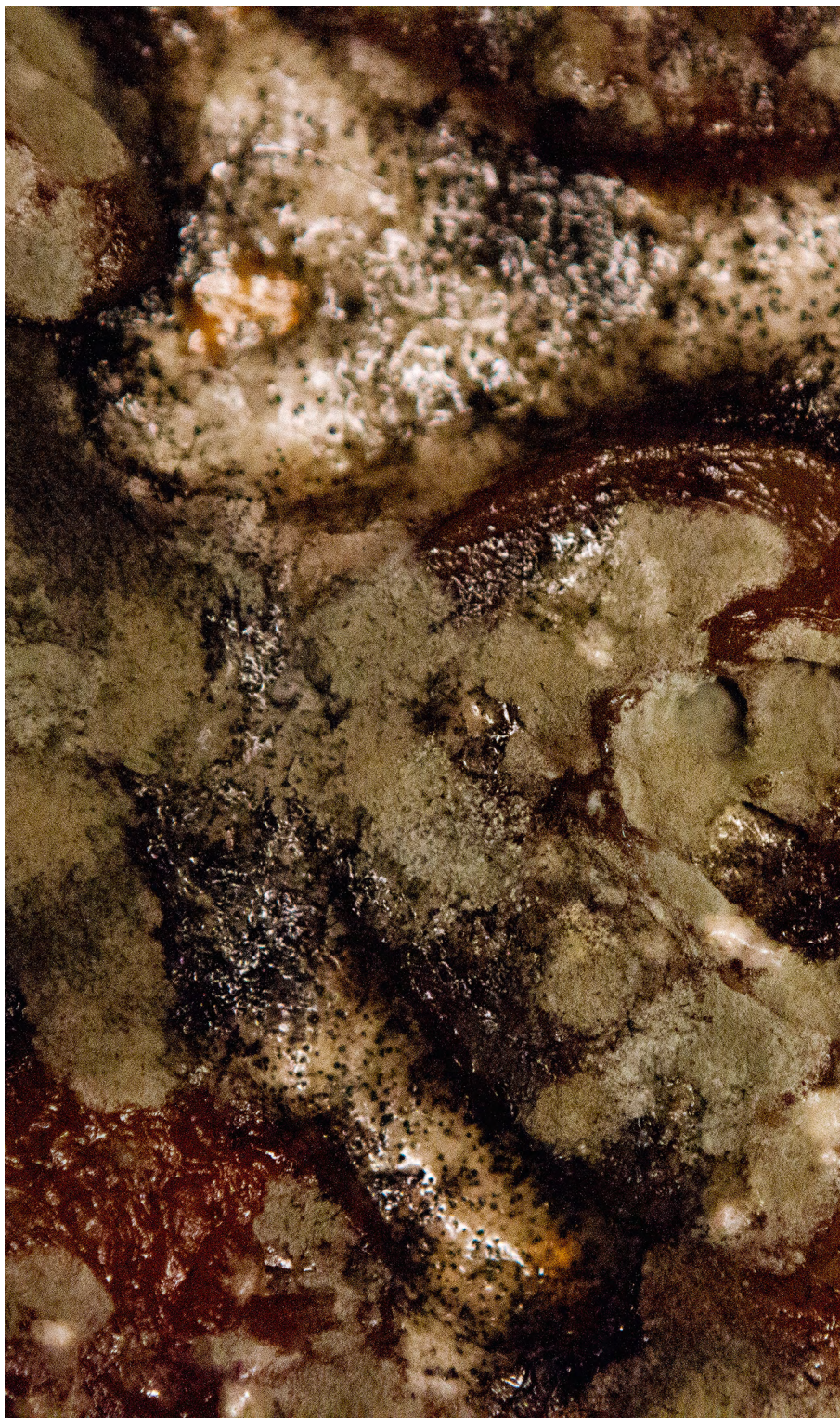
For the sake of all-embracing design we want to elegantly push the boundaries without erratically going overboard. That said, we see the boundary not just as a spatial, but also a temporal limit to culinary experience.

By way of example we display on the coming pages post-culinary design possibilities in the form of mental games, and in linguistic macro-recordings describe our impressions in light of this marginal work of stylized decay. The photographs offer visual evidence of what we thought, saw, and suspected when working on the mode.

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Photos: Zeitversiegelung, Florian Bitterlin















The increasing beauty of the table over the course of time engenders a smell that is tasty! Glances begin to exist on our tongue. The foods on the table themselves, on the other hand, are now only visual theories of their past. Anyone facing the table begins to experience nervousness: Looking at it, its current state penetrates the soul, and as when we breathe the mouth. Our eyes, savoring the food as well, look towards a new dimension, swallowing as they do. Our nose becomes our tactile sense, a touch for composure. At the sight of the table our thoughts become a confusing form of consumption. Through breathing alone our mere presence becomes an act of chewing.

Are we shaping the table or is the table shaping us?

A fart does not smell of excrement. Or only as strongly as milk smells of cheese.

In the Elugatic provinces farting is good manners. What here we have to be ashamed about was cultivated there. An elugatic epicure knows exactly how much caraway to sprinkle over the rind to particularly enjoy a post-culinary fart. This means that a *connaissanceur* Elugate makes more of his culinary design possibilities than a European, who discreetly tries to conceal the potential fermenting in him. Where an Elugate, by virtue of his being conscious of and steering his bodily possibilities, exerts great influence on the form his food takes, a European flushes a bucketful of design possibilities down the john: If an Elugate were to do that, it could be a statement. "Action digesting", as a form of expression of abstract post-culinary expressionism, for example. But here in the West, where, ashamed, we sit down on the white bowl to get rid of our potential as quietly as possible, we can at best call it propriety.

And what is with our chefs? Do they perhaps think further than we believe and wait in the kitchen until the liberating fart in Elugate fashion is the talk of the town here as well? Or do they run away from their own flatulence, like the rest of us, and for this reason never really know what they are doing?

The moist evening air is pointless. Fresh underwear is pointless. As pointless as traffic with that smell of its own, which only brings some relief. The table has become embedded in your nose! It lingers: invisible but present. Sweeter than sour and at the same time sourer than sweet. An olfactory contradiction.

Anyone who has entered the space only really leaves it hours after they actually left. What remains in our tiny nose hairs? What lingers for so long in the air – and where? When, after several hours of nasal tinnitus, the nose fetter loosens, the impression has not gone entirely, as there is a hint of putrefaction everywhere – and you can smell it now. The contradiction becomes a cycle.

And yet: time heals all odors: As it passes through our metamorphic respiratory tract the table enters a vale of tears before leaving it again later. Its smell through time is the dramaturgy of decay. On route to becoming what we never want to smell the first thing that the smell of the table develops is stinking putrefaction.

Then, very gently, after days of chaotic, almost unbearable stench, hints of vinegar, yeast aromas, and ultimately geosmin and petrichor begin to emerge. And we ask ourselves: are we smelling the table better, or is the table smelling better?

Eating slowly keeps you healthy. Keep to the right rhythm! Chew well! Produce lots of saliva! Lick your lips with your tongue after swallowing. And do not forget your lower lip. And then count. Count caudalies.

Caudalies? A caudalie is a unit used for measuring the number of seconds a taste persists. You count them (if you do at all) at least with wine. As proof of quality. One caudalie represents one second of a wine's finish. The more caudalies the better.

In *Vino Veritas*. As such:

If you eat caudalie-style, you eat well. It is not about producing lots of saliva and chewing well hundreds of times. It is about waiting. And waiting is easiest when you are eating, especially if the delicacies have lots of caudalies. Then you can while away the time with them and slither along the aroma curve.

So even when you are cooking take care to add lots of caudalies to the food. It is healthy and is only entertaining later on! When preparing the food, ask how many caudalies you have already had in your life, how many caudalies, on average, you eat every year? Is it possible that this average correlates with your life expectancy? Can being measured in terms of caudalies?

They shimmer, gleam, and sparkle: Sit cheekily, like dewdrops, on lettuces and tomatoes – and the smallest of them cling to the soft little hairs of fluff. They are condensation pearls. We know them as the tears of decay. They form beneath the plastic cover over the table: They move from the vegetable to the foil, then back to the vegetable. Again and again, becoming bigger as they do. So big that ultimately you can see them with your naked eye.

The fact that for maggots these droplets are a refreshing pleasure is no reason to be disgusted: It is a quality seal. They are the distillate of putrefaction, and as a distillate (like all distillates) are superior to other drops and droplets. Anybody who notices them is amazed. Who has ever tasted the dew that clings to the top of the packaging containing blue cheese?

We then miss the moment at which the end becomes the beginning. We are not present when the rotting process comes to an end and a new being manifests itself. It is not tangible, the moment between death and rebirth, at which everything becomes reversed.

We can shape the end, but not right to the end. We can shape the beginning, but not right from the beginning. We influence colors and smells, which in the course of the rotting process become ever more specific. The spectrum is narrowed down by shaping: Colorful becomes monochrome, but in a thousand hues. And a thousand possible instances of monochrome always ultimately become brown. Dust and brown earth. With brown, we lose control. With brown the designer becomes an observer.

Until something grows from brown again that is designable and colored. Colored like mold or colored like fresh fruit.

Some people wash their hands when they are in a restaurant. Some use soap after eating out.

Expensive restaurants have expensive liquid soap in the bathroom, while in standard inns the soap is, as a rule, cheap, and when washing their hands lots of people possibly have the mint in their mouth that they got with the bill.

Perhaps in this or that inn some benevolent thoughts have been given to these moments after a meal. But only in very few cases were these deliberations made specifically with the intention of post-culinary design.

In the unconsidered way it is presented, the mint may well even be the pinnacle of anti-design: After all, it is used to neutralize the preceding (designed) meal.

If you kiss somebody now, with your minty breath, you become a container, the host's crockery and source of aroma, the plate for a culinary expression (or anti-expression), but because you are not a plate you can guess what being a plate is like.

Are you now a medium or still a consumer? Can one be both at one and the same time? And anyway: What is a medium when you are eating? Everything? Is a really attentive host one that gives you toothpaste that suits the meal as you leave?

We ultimately fell in love with the table: In front of us there was true beauty. Having seen far too much of it, we still look at it. Allow our eyes to wallow in its appearance. Still see more colors. Still see more shapes. See more and more.

As beautiful as the table looks, it feels just as ugly to the touch. What we allowed to grow, we have to dispose of. What we made pictures of we now have to put in sacks. Brooks of rotten juice pour forth from the rotten tablecloths. We scrape buckets of slime from the rear of the decaying matter. Heavy sacks, almost fluid are the result of the results. And yet everything is driven by this moistness. Without moistness everything would only have dried up, whereas instead it all adopted a new form.

We would not get ill, and we would smell no different whatever, if always after eating food and shortly after its excretion we were to put on rubber gloves and knead our excrement for a short time. But we would certainly eat differently: We would perhaps have long since realized that cucumbers influence the consistency of what we discharge – or that in its post-culinary state, cheap pork smells horrible.

Culinarily speaking everyone is nowadays omniscient: It goes without saying that on any street corner you can buy crisps with cider vinegar from Brittany and pepper from Andalusia. We have great discussions about wine with our contemporaries, and there is Himalayan salt on every kitchen table.

Only when you are having a shit is it good, if it is not bad. Are we too modest? In the past twelve months what was the food you discharged noticeably good feces after? And what is good anyway? How do you describe it? What would the culinary world be like if by reflex you did not put the question to a physician but rather a chef?

Mold, however beautiful it may be, is only ever ugly in waste sacks. Disgustingly heavy. So dead and yet threatening. So leaden it almost makes you frightened. The table, no longer a table. Now only a board. The end, as concrete as it should never have become. With no vibrations whatsoever, just as the end should not be. An end without an end or a beginning. All you want, in the true sense of the word, is to dispose of it. A stationary end – waste – and for that reason so ugly.



