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From Spinach to Brain.

Comments on a Menu for the Workshop “Emotions on a Plate”, Held at Collegium Helveticum, 21. March 2007.

Introduction

As cooking scientists we devised a menu with the theme “Emotions on a Plate”.¹ Our goal was to render sensory, emotional, technological and historical aspects of food edible. This is obviously the case with everything we eat; food is good to think, to paraphrase Stanley J. Tambiah.² But this menu was specifically devised to comment on the talks of the workshop. We thus turned the thoughts presented at the workshop into literal food for thought. What came cut into disciplinary slices during the workshop (and henceforth documented in this volume) became mixed-up in the menu.

The menu was served as a buffet à la Française, where the guests could assemble their own plates. The menu was intended to be healthy for body and soul. We estimate that we prolonged the lives of our guests approximately 24 minutes, if they ate moderately and drank no more than 2 glasses of wine (La Colonie 2002, Vin de Pays d’Oc, Grenache-Carignan and Chateau Pierrail 2005, Bordeaux, Sauvignon Blanc & Sauvignon Gris). The menu started at the lower end of the food chain with roots and leaves and headed toward the upper end with meats.

First Course

The first course was intended to raise memories of childhood. Childhood foods are generally easy to digest, easy to chew and are healthy. They often come along with cautionary words from mothers, fathers, aunts and grandmothers, and the promise that if you eat the whole plate you’ll grow as big and strong as Popeye. This saying is a classic case of the popularization of an incorrectly interpreted measurement; in this case physiologist Gustav von Bunge measured

¹ The authors wish to thank Marcia Tugendhat for greatly improving the quality of language of this text. All the remaining stylistic obscurities are ours.

² Stanley Jeyarajah Tambiah: Animals are Good to Think and Good to Prohibit, *Ethnology* Vol.8, 1969, 423-457.

the amount of iron in dried spinach and the results were later wrongly applied to fresh spinach.³ Hence we still do not look like Popeye.

The first part of the first course was *Spinach-Puree with Cream*. The second part was a variation on the first, intended for the left-wing social democrats among us with houses in the Tuscany: a *Cima di Rape-Puree*, prepared in the same style as the Spinach. Cima di Rape resembles broccoli somewhat but tastes much more bitter. It also stands for the re-introduction of bitter tastes into the foods of Central Europeans.

In order to not only evoke memories but also create them, we used some pharmacological methods. Since we did not want to rely on little-tested ingredients of pharmaceutical companies, we returned to old and established procedures by adding 0.5 Grams of biologically grown cannabis sativa with a THC-level of approximately 14%. We added it to the Cima di Rape-Puree, because it harmonizes very well with the dark notes of the Cannabis (The Cannabis available nowadays in Switzerland has such high THC-levels that it has become very difficult to use it as seasoning without serious side-effects⁴). We did not tell the guests, which puree contained the Cannabis, so they could try to find out themselves. Thus this course became also a test in the perception of externally induced delayed emotions.

Second Course

The second course continued the theme of childhood memories with a kind of mashed potatoes, a seemingly typical German dish, rather recently introduced in the wake of the conquest of the Americas. We decided to serve the potatoes as *Pommes Duchesses*, mashed potatoes, dressed into a fancy form and baked in the oven. We served three different kinds of Pommes Duchesses purchased in different grocery stores, frozen, ready to bake in the oven. Another variety we prepared ourselves, cooking potatoes, mixing them with butter and egg and baking them in the oven.

Pommes Duchesses is an invention of classical French cuisine, usually served as a side dish to roast beef and other fancy meats. But its career is a classical case of “gesunkenes Kulturgut”

³ Bunge, Gustav: Weitere Untersuchungen über die Aufnahme des Eisens in den Organismus des Säuglings. *Zeitschrift für Physiologische Chemie*, Vol. 16, 1892, 173-186.

⁴ A test in 2002 revealed average THC-levels of 10-20 % with extremes of 28%, up from 1.5-6% in the early 1990ies (TV-Report, Kassensturz, SF-1, 26. Nov. 2002). Similar results are reported for the Netherlands: Pijlman, F.T.A., S. M. Rigter, J. Hoek, HMJ Goldschmidt and R. J. M. Niesink: Strong Increase in Total Delta-THC in Cannabis Preparations Sold in Dutch Coffee Shops. In: *Addiction Biology*, Vol. 10, Nr. 2, 2005, 171-180.

to use a term by the German folklorist Hans Naumann.⁵ It descended from haute cuisine and lost its appeal as a leftovers dish, or even as described in cookbooks of the early twentieth century, as a means to elaborately save time and money by first cooking whole potatoes, using them the next day for mashed potatoes and finally for Duchesses. Finally, when freezers became available for ordinary households after the Second World War, they started a career of middle-class modernity par excellence. Today this dish is well known for being part of the acryl-amide scare. Our guests could thus not only try to find out which kind of Duchesses came from which source, but also they could experiment with differently adjusting their acryl amide levels.

Third Course

Our second side dish was meant to highlight the diversity of foods available in the world and legal issues surrounding foods. We served *Rice-A-Roni® Spanish Rice “Same great Taste!”*, which is part of the “Classic Favorites” line of Rice-A-Roni®. Rice-A-Roni® Classic line further includes the “Chicken”, “Beef”, “Chicken & Garlic”, “Long Grain & Wild Rice”, “Chicken & Mushroom”, “Rice Pilaf”, “Fried Rice”, “Herb & Butter”, “Red Beans & Rice”, “Garden Vegetable”, “Chicken Teriyaki”, “Country Cheddar”, “Creamy Four Cheese”, “Chicken & Broccoli”, “Broccoli Au Gratin”, “Mexican Style”, and “Parmesan Chicken” varieties. There is also a „Nature’s Way“ line, including for example “Italian Cheese and Herb” variety, a „Savory Whole Grain Blends“ line, which includes „Chicken and Herb Classico“ and a „Lower Sodium“ line.

Our chosen Spanish Rice “blends tender rice and vermicelli with Spanish seasonings to create a zesty taste inspired by Spain”. According to the pictures on the package it is produced in a cosy looking small town somewhere in the middle of Spain, possibly made by hand by some old men, who sing folk tunes while working. Rice-A-Roni® asks “Did you know that the foods that you choose to eat can have a major impact on your overall health?” and indeed, this is not a rhetorical questions since on its website Rice-A-Roni® provides detailed instructions on “how to read food labels”. After having learned how to read the labels, we found out that, among others ingredients, a portion of Rice-A-Roni® Spanish Rice contains 11 % of daily value of fat, of which 1/7 are trans-fats, 58% of daily value of sodium, 15% of Vitamin A, and 10% of iron (forget about spinach). Rice-A-Roni® is masterfully engineered from the following ingredients: rice, wheat flour, onions, salt, green peppers with sodium sulfite for color retention, monosodium glutamate, hydrolyzed soy protein, paprika, dextrose,

⁵ Hans Naumann, *Grundzüge der deutschen Volkskunde*, Wissenschaft und Bildung, Leipzig, 1922.

spices, natural flavors, niacin, ferrous sulfate, ferric orthophosphate, garlic, thiamin mononitrate, folic acid, and riboflavin.

Rice-A-Roni® is also of legal interest, since it is forbidden in Switzerland and the European Union, because it contains genetically modified rice. However this is not mentioned on the package, but it can be found out by visiting the true-food shopping guide of “True Food Now,”⁶ an organisation that is interested in epistemological issues of food. Just as the producers, the European lawmakers believe that Rice-A-Roni® has “a major impact on your health”, but rather in a negative regard.

Fourth Course

With our fourth course, we venture into the fancy lands of so-called fusion cuisine. Even though every cuisine fuses traditions and ideas, in recent years the mixture of Asian with European and American traditions seems to have become important. We made a *Chicken-Surimi-Terrine with Citrus-Walnut-Capers-Salsa*. The Terrine was slightly pink (surimi) on the lower half and pink-beige (chicken) on the upper half. This terrine enabled the guests to explore the sensory mysteries relating to the similarities of crab/surimi and chicken tastes and the different receptors for these tastes.

The Terrine is another example of a dish that has a long career among different classes, from the recycling of lower-quality pieces of meats to a classic dish of haute cuisine, with goose-liver and truffles, and back to convenience food for everybody. Our homemade chicken-surimi-terrine was also a variation on the theme of *mar-y-mont*, as the Catalans like to call it, a mix of seafood and meat. Furthermore this dish provides an interesting case of two different ways of engineering food products. In the case of chicken, one of the most optimised living beings in the world, engineering takes place before death, with scientifically enhanced cages, lighting, feeding and killing. As long as they are alive, chickens are working hard together with scientists to “make the right choice” and become better food, as reported by Norton et. al: „It is clear from this experiment that broiler chickens will attempt to maximise performance by choosing the best possible combination of protein sources when given the opportunity to do so“.⁷ In the case of surimi, which is made out of fish, engineering happens after butchering and the fish cannot help becoming better food. Fish of lower quality is rinsed, beaten, and pulverised and then starch, egg white, salt, vegetable oil, sorbitol, sugar, soy

⁶ http://www.truefoodnow.org/shoppersguide/guide_printable.html

⁷ R. M. Gous and H. K. Swatson: Mixture Experiments: A Severe Test of the Ability of a Broiler Chicken to Make the Right Choice. *British Poultry Science*, Vol. 41, Nr. 2, 2000, 136-140.

protein, and seasonings are added.-Before the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), it was common practice in the industry to add bovine blood plasma. You might think that surimi is a high tech food par excellence, but the basic technique, the conservation of fish with the help of sugars, was invented in eastern Asia some 900 years ago.

Fifth Course

Our next course moved from a focus on food technology and taste to the experiencing of emotions, for which we need a body with adequately equipped organs. Since it was our intention to shed light on historical beliefs about food and emotion, we began with the heart, the historical and current locus of emotion in folk psychology. We served *Veal Heart on a Bed of Swiss Chard Topped with Pears Poached in Syrup*. This is a typical Swiss dish called “*Pflüdder und Glünggis*”, well known in the Canton Aargau since the 14th century.⁸ Heart is seldom used; it lost its appeal in favor of the seemingly “better” cuts of meat, but we await its reappearance in haute-cuisine.

Swiss chard provides an interesting case of naming ingredients according to their country of presumed origin. In Switzerland itself they are called Krautstiel (literally: herb-stem), which is not related to the derogatory term “Kraut” for Germans, but hints at the fact that Krautstiel has no clear-cut division between the stem and the leaf. In Germany, it is not called Kraut but “Mangold”, a term which in Switzerland encompasses two distinct plants, Krautstiel and Mangold. This example demonstrates how linguistic and cultural variations in the naming of plants and foods generate a multiplicity of possible dishes.

Sixth Course

It is not enough to have emotions; we must also be able to perceive them first and express them second. An elaborate organ is required for the perception of taste and formulation of utterances: the tongue. Consequently our next course was *Veal Tongue uttering Saffronised Letter-Salad* (made of Pasta-Letters) *on Salsa Verde*. This dish was an attempt at autopoietic language acquisition (A question that looms large: Is language-acquisition innate or dependent on the intake of letters and words?). It is again a very classical Swiss dish, but served with a typical Italian sauce. Italian dishes are among the first dishes that arrived with migrants in the 20th century that ordinary Swiss people experienced. But the salsa verde was not among them.

⁸ Rütimann, Christoph: Weitere Rezepte aus den Kantonen Wallis, Graubünden und Aargau. Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde, 1919, 251-267.

Seventh Course

In 1682, a “philosophical supper” was organised at the Royal Society, something very similar to the very event we were part of.⁹ It was organized in honour of a French doctor, who moved with a recommendation by Huygens to London to work in the laboratory of the famous Robert Boyle. The dinner was held to celebrate one of the inventions of this French doctor and we used it to produce the seventh course. The French doctor’s name was Denis Papin and his invention, made three years earlier, was the so-called “digester”, today better known as a pressure cooker. It allows ingredients to be cooked very rapidly with steam, using less energy and retaining more of the healthy vitamins. It can be used for various other purposes as well, as for example for antigen-retrieval.¹⁰ Since Papin’s time, the basic technology has remained the same, but it had been developed into more ecological versions, such as a solar appliance invented in 1961 by William C. Lee. (US. Pat. 2 994 318) and more modern ones, such as a type to use with microwaves, invented for Raytheon by Arthur E. Welch in 1951 (US. Pat. 2 622 187).

With the pressure cooker, we also get to the location of most modern theories of perception and emotions, often under pressure as well: grey matter composed of synapses working like computers (or maybe not). We combined *Veal Brain* with those similarly fractal-like structures considered not to be sentient (perhaps incorrectly), namely *Cauliflower*. The cauliflower was *topped with Brösel*. The latter is a reference to one of the authors’ family history, which stretches east, to so called “Kakanien”, in the old Habsburg empire, where “Brösel”, or breadcrumbs in butter, are the generic accompaniment of almost everything. On cauliflower they give the tender consistency of the vegetable a crunchy twist. Breadcrumbs could be a chapter on their own, since they are made from bread, the most important staple of many people, and they are used for a dazzling variety of things, often in poor people’s

⁹ A well-known report of the event can be found in: Evelyn, John: *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, F.R.S. to which is Surjoined between King Charles I. and Sir Edward Nicholas, and between Sir Edward Hyde, afterwards Earl Of Clarendon, and Sir Richard Browne. Edited from the Original Mss. at Wotton by William Bray, Esq. F.A.S. A New Edition in Four Volumes. Corrected, Revised, and Enlarged. Vol. II. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1862, 175.*

¹⁰ Andrew J. Norton, Suzanne Jordan and Patricia Yeomans: *Brief, High-Temperature Heat Denaturation (Pressure Cooking): A Simple and Effective Method of Antigen Retrieval for Routinely Processed Tissues. The Journal of Pathology, Vol. 173, Nr. 4, 371-379.*

cuisine, but they also became a very elaborately engineered product which is use in many fast foods.

Eighth Course

Last, we get to dessert and again return to Swiss history and childhood memories, but here through oriental pathways. We made *Rice-Pudding with Plum-Compote*. The rice was again imported from the USA, possibly genetically modified (though we did not check on this). The compote was given a twist with some *Pink Pepper*, also known as Brazilian Pepper. The compote, at least in German as “Kompott”, has an interesting linguistic history. The idea of compote derives from the Latin word “compositio” for mixture. It is named so because the Romans used to eat mixtures of fruit, nuts and cheese for desert. However, the German word “Kompott” derives from “compotor”, the comrade, the fellow in a booze-up, because that became the ending of meals after the Romans left those lands.